



The FDA has approved Narcan nasal spray OTC

myMatrixx Chief Clinical Officer, Phil Walls, RPh, answers your questions

On March 29, 2023, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) formally approved¹ Narcan, a name-brand nasal spray version of the generic drug naloxone, to be sold over the counter (OTC) for widespread purchase. This resulted from a committee of advisors voting unanimously to recommend making Narcan nationally available after reviewing a briefing document² submitted by Emergent, the manufacturer of the drug.

Why is this important?

Due to the ongoing dangers posed by opioids in workers' compensation, wider availability of Narcan has a high potential to save lives.

Are we still experiencing an opioid epidemic?

Yes. Despite significant gains in overcoming opioid misuse³ in both workers' compensation and general prescribing, the opioid crisis remains a major health and safety concern. In 2022 alone, 110,236 drug overdose deaths⁴ occurred in the general population, although the overwhelming majority were related to illicit, not prescription, drug use. And while the CDC reports⁵ opioids prescribed to those on workers' compensation being cut nearly in half between 2012 and 2022, opioids are still a safety issue for injured workers.

Opioids and related drugs that constitute the biggest dangers to injured workers:

- **Fentanyl** is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine and used for severe chronic pain. The synthetic analogues of fentanyl (acetylfentanyl, carfentanil, etc.) raise concern for illicit use and a growing contribution to drug overdoses.
- **Prescription opioids** are generally recommended for short-term pain relief, but when used long-term, they increase a patient's risk of tolerance and addiction.
- **Prescription opioids used in combination** with other potentially dangerous substances—such as gabapentinoids and benzodiazepines—increase the risk of overdose.

What does FDA approval mean for Narcan OTC purchases?

States have their own laws regarding Narcan and naloxone, with many making it available OTC in some form. However, FDA approval is an opportunity to streamline the process and reduce barriers to access on a national level, especially with the relative safety and lack of side effects of the drug.



Claims professionals may continue to see Narcan prescriptions as part of workers' compensation claims.

Is Narcan safe and easy to administer?

Narcan has been found to be generally safe, with no effect in the absence of opioids and no side effects. Narcan OTC is designed to be administered quickly and by those with no previous medical training.

How to respond to an opioid overdose and administer Narcan:

1. Check for signs of an opioid overdose, including unresponsiveness, slow or absent breathing and pinpoint pupils.
2. Position individual on back, insert tip of spray bottle into either nostril and press plunger.
3. After administering Narcan, call 911 immediately.
4. Use caution: Individuals coming out of an opioid overdose following Narcan administration are immediately thrown into withdrawal and may be combative. Many people providing assistance have been injured by the person they are helping.

Note: Narcan only works for an opioid overdose and is ineffective in any other overdose situation.

Working together, working for better.

As part of the Evernorth family, myMatrixx is committed to ensuring injured workers receive the support they need to get back to fulfilling and productive activity. Our goal is to provide clinical value, innovative technology and actionable data analytics — all squarely focused on workers' compensation patient advocacy.



Ask your myMatrixx pharmacist if you have any questions regarding the change to OTC status for Narcan.

You can also reach the myMatrixx clinical team at clinical@myMatrixx.com.

Sources

1. FDA. "FDA Approves First Over-the-Counter Naloxone Nasal Spray." [Press release]. March 29, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-over-counter-naloxone-nasal-spray>
2. Emergent BioSolutions. "Topic: Rx-to-OTC switch for NARCAN® (naloxone HCl) Nasal Spray 4 mg, NDA 208411." Joint Meeting of the Nonprescription Drug and the Anesthetic and Analgesic Drug Products Advisory Committees. [Briefing document]. February 15, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/media/165339/download>
3. myMatrixx. "2020 Workers' Compensation Drug Trend Report." 2020. <https://www.mymatrixx.com/2020-drug-trend-report>
4. National Center for Health Statistics. "Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts." CDC. April 12, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>
5. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). "Data on Opioids in the Workplace." CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/opioids/data.html>
6. CDC. "CDC Releases Updated Clinical Practice Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Pain." [Press release]. November 3, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p1103-Prescribing-Opioids.html>

Learn more about our workers' compensation products and solutions at [myMatrixx.com](https://www.mymatrixx.com).