

# Responding to opioid impairment

## Explain dangers

Under a doctor's supervision, opioid medications (e.g., oxycodone, hydrocodone, and codeine) can be used to safely manage pain. But improper use of any type of opioid can lead to impairment, overdose, or even death. Workers who perform high-risk work while impaired by opioids could seriously injure themselves or others.

A worker could become impaired from using a legally-produced opioid if they take someone else's opioid medication, have underlying health issues, combine the opioid with a sedative, exceed the recommended dosage, or mix the opioid with alcohol or other drugs.

It is possible to overdose on any type of opioid, but many opioid-related deaths among recreational users have occurred when an illegally-produced opioid was laced with another substance, such as fentanyl.

## Identify controls

People who use opioids can reduce their risk of overdose or death by:

- Not using the substance alone
- Knowing their tolerance (i.e., how much they can safely consume)
- Having a naloxone kit available
- Using a small amount of an opioid to check its strength before taking a full dose
- Not mixing opioids with alcohol or other drugs (unless the drugs were prescribed by their doctor)

If workers suspect someone at their workplace might be struggling with opioid misuse, they can support them in the following ways:

- Direct the co-worker to sources of professional help. For example, The Brave App and the National Overdose Response Service hotline (1-888-688-NORS[6677]) are available to all Canadians should they choose to use opioids alone.
- Act immediately and report any concerns to a supervisor if they suspect a co-worker is struggling with opioid or substance use or is impaired by drugs or alcohol at work.

- Ensure that all workplace parties can locate the on-site naloxone kit and complete training on how to administer naloxone. Administering naloxone immediately can reverse an opioid overdose and save someone's life. IHSA offers a comprehensive **Naloxone training** eLearning program. It can be accessed at [IHSA.ca/eLearning](https://www.ihsa.ca/eLearning).
- Show compassion and remember that opioid misuse is not a character flaw; it is a medical issue that requires treatment.

## Demonstrate

Tell workers where they can access policies and reporting procedures related to impairment at work.

Consider adopting CSA standard *Z1008:21 Management of impairment in the workplace* and review its implementation guideline. Complete the related online training, *Managing impairment in the workplace*, which can be accessed at [CSAGroup.org](https://www.csagroup.org).

Direct workers to opioid-related resources on [IHSA.ca](https://www.ihsa.ca), such as the **Opioid crisis in the trades toolkit** or the **Opioid use and workplace implications for trade sectors guide (W132)**.