



Drug Tolerance and Risk of Overdose

Drug Tolerance

Tolerance is how your body adapts to regular use of a drug over time. As you develop tolerance to a drug, you will usually need to use more of it to feel the effect you want. If you have no or low tolerance to a drug, using even a small amount can increase your risk of overdose.

Your tolerance decreases if you:

- Stop or take a break from using drugs.
- Reduce the amount of drugs you use, even if only for a short time.
- Change the type of drugs you use.
- Change how you take drugs.
- Use drugs that are not as strong as you are used to, even if only for a short time.

Tolerance can be affected by changes in the illicit drug supply, such as:

- Shortages or inconsistent access to drugs
- Unpredictable changes in drug quality, purity and strength

Drug tolerance can be affected by other factors, such as illness, stress, new or different environments, and changes to the way people access and use drugs. People who have been recently released from jail, prison or detention or discharged from the hospital or a drug treatment program are at increased risk of overdose because they may not have had access to drugs or medications for opioid use disorder (OUD) in these settings.

Protecting Yourself From Overdose

You are at increased risk of overdose if your tolerance has decreased. Think about how your drug use may have changed recently and how it may affect your tolerance. Ask yourself:

- Have I been using drugs less frequently?
- Have I been taking smaller doses?
- Have there been times when I stopped or took a break from using drugs?
- Has the quality of the drugs I use changed?
- Have I changed what drugs I use?
- Have I changed how I take the drugs I use?
- If I experience stressors, such as job loss, the death of a loved one or housing insecurity, am I likely to increase the amount of drugs I use?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, your tolerance may be affected. Always take steps to protect yourself from overdose, especially if your tolerance is lower:

- Plan ahead. Create an overdose safety plan with someone who knows you are going to use. To learn more, visit on.nyc.gov/od-safety-plan.
- Avoid using alone. Use drugs with other people and take turns. If you do use alone, call the Never Use Alone hotline at 877-696-1966 before using so someone can monitor you over the phone.
- Buy or use drugs from people you know and trust and ask about the drug quality when possible.
- Talk to other people who use drugs to learn about their experiences and what resources may be available to you.
- Test your drugs for fentanyl, a powerful opioid that can increase your risk of overdose, using fentanyl test strips. To learn more and find fentanyl test strips and a syringe service program (SSP) near you, visit on.nyc.gov/46KCOYg.
- Go slow by taking small amounts.
- Always have naloxone, a safe medication that can reverse an opioid overdose, nearby.
- Avoid mixing drugs, including alcohol. If possible, use only one drug at a time.

Resources

- SSPs provide harm reduction services and sterile drug equipment to people who use drugs. For more information, visit nyc.gov/alcoholanddrugs.
- To find naloxone near you, call **311** or visit nyc.gov/naloxone.
- Two medications for OUD, buprenorphine and methadone, have been clinically proven to reduce risk of overdose. If you are interested in taking medication to help manage your opioid use, talk to a health care or harm reduction provider. To find a provider, visit the New York State Office of Addiction Supports and Services' treatment locator at findaddictiontreatment.ny.gov.
- Contact 988 for free, confidential crisis counseling, mental health and substance use support, and referrals to care. Call or text 988 or chat at nyc.gov/988. Counselors are available 24/7 by phone call in more than 200 languages.

4.24