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Overdose Prevention and Response





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As many people will be aware there has been a heroin drought in the past few months, which will have resulted in the reduction of heroin users tolerance levels.

Much of the Heroin has been cut with other agents to disguise the low quality and the bulk it up , as previously highlighted new injectors have been presenting to services as clients were reporting that they were unable to smoke the heroin due to the low quality.

There are now reports from areas that higher purity heroin is now available, its vital that clients are informed on overdose risk and prevention methods, as the risk of overdose is elevated due to higher quality now available.

There are 2 sections brief notes for workers, and notes for clients, these can be printed out and agencies have area where contact details can be placed

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions email tim@inef.ie



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Notes for Workers

Tolerance

Tolerance develops over time, so the amount of a drug a long-time user needs to feel the drug's effects is a lot greater than a newer user. Tolerance also wavers depending on several factors including, weight, size, illness, stress, compromised immune system (from hepatitis for example), and age. Your tolerance actually *decreases* over time, which is why there are more deaths among older users. Most importantly, tolerance can decrease rapidly when someone has taken a break from using a substance whether intentionally while in drug treatment or on methadone detox, or unintentionally while in jail or the hospital. Research has also shown that tolerance is effected when a person uses drugs in a new or unfamiliar environment, and therefore at a higher risk for overdose.

Quality (how pure a drug is)

The content and purity of street drugs is always unpredictable. They are often "cut" with other drugs or materials that can be dangerous. You can't tell how pure your drugs are from looking at it, and purity levels are always changing, which means you can do a shot that's a lot stronger than what you are used to and put yourself at risk of an overdose.

Prevention: *Do a tester shot, release the tourniquet, and try to buy from the same dealer so you have a better idea of what you're getting.*



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Using Alone

While using alone isn't necessarily a cause of overdose, it increases the chance of fatally overdosing because there is no one there to call for help or take care of you if you go out. Many fatal overdoses have occurred behind closed or locked doors where the victims could not be found and no one was there to intervene.

Prevention: *FIX WITH A FRIEND! Develop an overdose plan with your friends or partners, leave the door unlocked or slightly ajar, call someone you trust and have them check on you.*

Mixing increases risk. Drugs that may be low risk for overdose alone, especially drugs with the same effects, can greatly increase risk of overdose when combined. Drinking alcohol or taking benzodiazepines with heroin or other depressants is much riskier than using heroin alone.



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How do you know if someone is really high or overdosing?

If someone is really high and using downers like heroin, alcohol, and pills...

- Muscles are slack and droopy
- They might "nod out"
- Speech may be slurred
- Pupils will contract and appear small
- They might be out of it, but they will respond to outside stimulus like loud noise or a push
- Scratch a lot due to itchy skin

If someone is really high and using stimulants like speed, cocaine, or ecstasy...

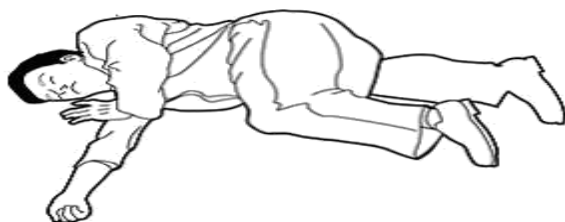
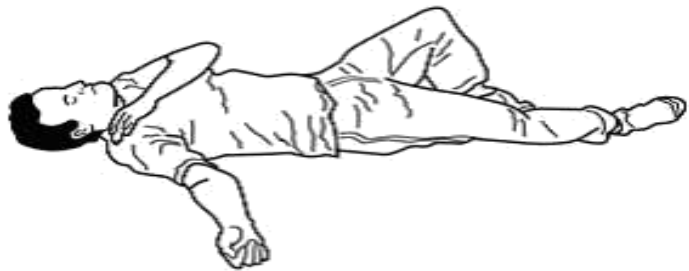
- Pupils will be enlarged
- Very alert and energetic, euphoric
- They might be paranoid and agitated
- Decreased appetite

Please remind clients of the recovery position see sheet below



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Recovery Position





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1. **Understand** your tolerance and **be aware** of when it might be lower (for example, when you have not been using for a while).
2. **Avoid** mixing drugs, and mixing drugs and alcohol.
3. **Recognise** that medications prescribed by a doctor may interact with street drugs and cause an overdose.
4. Take care of your health: eat well, drink plenty of water, and sleep.
5. If you have a new dealer or unfamiliar supply, **use a small** amount at first to see how strong it is.
6. **Avoid using alone**: if you overdose, you want someone around to help.
7. You're less likely to overdose from snorting or smoking drugs than injecting them.

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Strategies to reduce overdose risk when your tolerance has decreased:

1. **Take control** of your own drug preparation and intake. It is likely that a smaller dose will get you high.
2. **Divide** your normal dose in half, do a tester shot, and allow the drugs time to take effect before you do more.
3. **Consider** changing your route of administration to something that gets you high more slowly. If you usually inject, try snorting.
4. **Use with someone** else who knows how to help in case you overdose.

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Strategies for reducing overdose risk related to mixing drugs:

1. **Avoid mixing** drugs that have the same effects. For example do not mix opiates with alcohol or pills (all depressants), and do not mix methamphetamine with cocaine (both stimulants).
2. If mixing drugs with different effects, **reduce the amount** of all drugs used and use slowly.
3. Try to always use the drug that comes on more slowly (like pills) first and wait for it to take effect before taking drugs that come on very fast (like anything you inject or smoke). This will help you judge how high you are before you take something that could cause an overdose.

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Strategies for reducing overdose risk related to mixing drugs and alcohol:

1. **Avoid mixing** alcohol with street drugs.
2. If you decide to mix, set an amount of each drug and an amount of alcohol that you believe are safe for you, and **do not exceed** that amount.
3. **If drinking and injecting** together, inject before drinking and wait for it to take effect before beginning to drink. This will help you gauge how much alcohol you can safely consume.
4. **Eat regularly**

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Strategies for users to reduce overdose risk due to accumulation:

1. Let your drugs take effect before using more to **avoid** overwhelming the body.
2. Before you begin using, **plan** how much you will use during that session, and **do not exceed** that amount. If you have more than you decide to use in that session, put the rest away where you will not be tempted to go to it and surpass your limit.
3. **Be aware** of how long the drugs (and alcohol) you are using stay in your body to **avoid** a surprise buildup and overdose.
4. If drinking alcohol and injecting drugs at the same time, **inject your dose first before you drink**. This way you can better control the amount of alcohol you consume after the shot has taken effect in your body.
5. **Wait** as long as possible before re-dosing. If others are around, ask them to remind you to wait

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