



Saving Lives in Texas: The Facts on Opioids

[TxOpioidResponse.org](https://www.txopioidresponse.org)

Talking About Opioids

If you're concerned that a friend or family member may be misusing opioids, speak up. It may be challenging, but discussing opioid misuse and addiction can save someone's life. Find tips on starting the conversation with someone you care about:

[TxOpioidResponse.org/How-To-Help-Someone](https://www.txopioidresponse.org/How-To-Help-Someone)

Where to Find Help

Knowing where to find naloxone or access medical care for opioid use disorder is critical. Find what's available near you:

[TxOpioidResponse.org/Resources](https://www.txopioidresponse.org/Resources)

One in four Texans has experienced an opioid overdose or knows someone who has, according to surveys funded by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission in 2020 and 2021. Every Texan needs to understand the dangers of misusing opioids and how to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.

Understanding Opioids and Their Risks

Opioids are a class of drugs that reduce pain. They include prescription opioids, synthetic opioids (such as fentanyl and nitazenes), opioids from natural sources (like heroin), and other similarly acting substances (like kratom). Prescription opioids can safely manage severe pain when taken as directed by a doctor, but misusing them can put you at risk of an overdose. Misuse includes taking more than prescribed, using someone else's medication or using it for non-medical purposes.

Combining opioids with alcohol or other drugs, such as sleeping pills or cough medication, increases overdose and death risk. Xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer also known as "tranq" or "tranq dope," may be combined with opioids, including fentanyl, significantly increasing fatal overdose risk. No drug approved for humans can reverse the effects of xylazine. In some parts of the U.S., it has largely replaced fentanyl in the drug supply and can cause severe wounds and other health complications.

The Dangers of Synthetic Opioids: Fentanyl and Nitazenes

Synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl and nitazenes, are lab-made, extremely powerful drugs driving overdose deaths across Texas and the U.S. Fentanyl can be up to 50 times stronger than heroin. When prescribed and closely monitored, fentanyl can safely treat severe pain, such as after surgery or during cancer treatment. Illegally made fentanyl is extremely dangerous and nearly impossible to detect because you can't see, taste or smell it. Even amounts equal to a few grains of sand can be deadly. That means that any pill could be the one that causes an overdose. Remember, one pill kills.

Nitazenes are a reemerging class of extremely powerful synthetic opioids increasingly found in counterfeit pills or mixed with other substances, often without a person's knowledge. As regulations have targeted fentanyl-like drugs, nitazenes are appearing more often as a dangerous substitute¹ in illegal drugs. Like fentanyl, nitazenes can cause rapid, life-threatening overdoses, are difficult to detect, and may be added to substances without a person realizing it.

Counterfeit pills may look like pharmacy medications, including:

- Oxycodone
- Vicodin
- Percocet
- Xanax
- Adderall

Fentanyl and nitazenes can be added to illegal substances, such as:

- Heroin
- Cocaine
- Methamphetamine
- MDMA (also known as "ecstasy" or "Molly")



What makes synthetic opioids especially dangerous is:

- Overdose risk is very high, even with very small amounts.
- Naloxone can reverse overdoses, but multiple doses may be needed.
- They are often mixed with other substances or added to counterfeit pills.
- They are hard to detect because routine drug tests used in emergency rooms do not always screen for them.



Recognizing an Opioid Overdose

Recognizing overdose signs and responding quickly can save a life. Look for:

- Small, constricted “pinpoint pupils.”
- Face is extremely pale or clammy to the touch.
- Body goes limp.
- Fingernails or lips turn purple or blue.
- Vomiting or making gurgling noises.
- Can’t be awakened or can’t speak.
- Breathing or heartbeat slows or stops.
- For people with lighter skin, the skin and lips may turn blue or purple. For people with darker skin, the skin may turn gray or ashen.



Responding to an Opioid Overdose

It may be difficult to tell if someone is experiencing an overdose. Naloxone will not harm someone if opioids are not present in their system, so it’s always best to use it if you’re worried it may be an overdose. Steps to follow:

- **Call 911 right away.**
- **Try to wake the person up.**
- **Tilt the person’s head back and give naloxone, if available.** Naloxone will reverse an opioid overdose, even if the person remains sedated due to xylazine or medetomidine. Keeping it on hand could mean the difference between life and death for you or someone else.
- **Begin rescue breathing or CPR, if needed.** Xylazine and medetomidine can slow or stop breathing, so breathing support is critical.
- **If the person is breathing on their own, place them on their side to prevent choking.** Do not interrupt rescue breathing or CPR unless the person vomits and their airway needs to be cleared.
- **Stay with the person until emergency services arrive.**