

Get the Facts: Polysubstance Use

If you use drugs (even just experimentally, occasionally, or recreationally), you are at risk of overdose. Learn more about polysubstance use and how you can reduce your risks.

What is polysubstance use?

Taking in **two or more substances (drugs)** together or within a short period of time

On purpose

People may combine drugs to experience the effects of the combination, increase/decrease the effects of a different drug or reduce symptoms of withdrawal.

Accidentally

People may unintentionally consume drugs — such as fentanyl or xylazine — that have been mixed or cut into other drugs without their knowledge.

58%

of unintentional overdose deaths in Oregon in 2022 involved **two or more substances**.

80%

of Oregon's polysubstance overdose deaths in 2022 involved **fentanyl**.

Fentanyl is more commonly being mixed with other drugs like heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine. It is also made into counterfeit pills that resemble legitimate prescription medications.

What can happen when mixing?

Regardless of the combination and someone's prior experience, taking multiple drugs at once **is never safe** — it can have an unpredictable, sometimes deadly, effect.

“Downers” or depressants

Opioids (fentanyl, oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, heroin), benzodiazepines can slow down breathing and increase risk of organ damage, overdose and death.

“Uppers” or stimulants

Methamphetamines, amphetamines, cocaine, ecstasy can increase your heart rate and blood pressure to dangerous levels and can heighten risk of brain injury, liver damage, heart attack, stroke and death.

Stimulants plus depressants

Mixing stimulants and depressants doesn't balance or cancel them out. This combination can be unpredictable and can “mask” the impact of one or both drugs, making it **easier to overdose**.

What about alcohol?

Alcohol is a depressant, like other “downers”.

Mixing alcohol with other drugs can increase risk of overdose and cause serious damage to the brain, heart and other organs.

What about prescriptions?

Mixing prescribed medications (e.g. antidepressants, pain relievers, hypertension medication, sleeping pills) with any drugs **also increases the risk** of organ damage and overdose.

Reduce your risk and respond to an overdose

Reduce your risk

- Assume that any pill, powder, or other drug you get from anyone other than your doctor or pharmacist contains other drugs, including **fentanyl and/or xylazine**.
- When using drugs, **start low and go slow** — start with a low dose and only increase gradually to check the strength and effects of the drug.
- **Avoid mixing** multiple drugs, including alcohol.
- **Never use alone** — Call the Never Use Alone hotline at **800-484-3731** or use the [Brave App](#).
- **Always carry naloxone** with you, and have it ready.
- **Test all the drugs you are planning to use with drug testing strips**. Testing strips are a valuable harm reduction tool but may not be 100% accurate. Assume any illicit substance contains fentanyl. Find drug testing strips and save syringes at [nasen.org](https://www.nasen.org) or via **211**.
- **Talk to your loved ones** about your drug use and drug use plans. Prevention can start with a conversation.



If you or someone you know is in a crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat online at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

To access prevention tools

- Get **naloxone** over-the-counter at most pharmacies in Oregon.
- Visit the [Behavioral Health Resource Network Dashboard](#) or [recovery-networkoforegon.org](https://www.recovery-networkoforegon.org) to find local resources.

To learn more

- Visit [reverseoverdose.org](https://www.reverseoverdose.org).
- Check out OHA's [harm reduction webpage](#).



Respond and save a life

- Toxic amounts of opioids like **oxycodone, fentanyl, and heroin** can cause:
 - Very slow breathing, with little to no chest movements
 - Snoring or gurgling sounds
 - Cold or clammy skin
 - Blue or grayish lips/inside of mouth
 - Lack of consciousness, inability to wake up
- If you think someone is overdosing from opioids or multiple drugs:
 - Check for response (shout, “are you ok?”; grind knuckles into chest bone; check for breathing).
 - Call 911.
 - Give one dose of naloxone.
 1. Place tip of nasal spray in nostril until fingers touch the bottom of their nose.
 2. Press plunger firmly to give dose.
 3. Check for breathing.

Naloxone will not harm someone who is not experiencing an opioid overdose.

- If the person is not breathing, **it is critical** to start rescue breathing.
- If not breathing within three minutes, give another dose of naloxone.
- Help them into the recovery position — lying down on their side with their head supported.
- Stay with them until help arrives. Tell the first responders that naloxone has been given.



Remember

Oregon's Good Samaritan law **protects** the caller and the person who has overdosed from being criminally charged.