

# What to do in a Drug-Related Emergency

Always call **911** in an emergency. Call **988** if you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health emergency.

**The Indiana Lifeline Law** protects you from prosecution for certain offenses if you are reporting a medical emergency. It is time to act if you see these symptoms.

## Seizure

If they are having a seizure, keep the area safe. Move anything that could hurt them - tables, chairs, or people. Get someone to stop any music, turn up the lights, and clear the space. Don't try to restrain them. Only move them if they are in immediate danger.

- **Cushion their head if they're on the ground.**
- **Loosen any tight clothing around their neck, such as a collar or ties, to aid breathing.**
- **After their convulsions stop, turn them on their side into the Recovery Position.**

Call 911. Tell the paramedics if the seizure stops and starts, how long it lasted, or if the person turned blue.



## Unconscious

Call 911 if:

- **They can't be woken by shaking their shoulders and calling their name.**
- **You notice a blueness of the skin, including lips and fingernails (or grayish for darker complexions).**
- **They have trouble breathing.**

Check that there is nothing stuck in their throat. If there is, remove it. For vomit, turn their head to the side and let gravity assist you. If that doesn't work, turn their far shoulder towards you so that their mouth points towards the ground for 5 seconds. If they are still unconscious, don't waste time: give naloxone and start rescue breathing immediately. You should put an unconscious person who is still breathing into the recovery position. If they vomit while on their back, they can choke and die.



## Bad Trip or Paranoia

If somebody is having a bad trip or experiencing paranoia, take them somewhere quiet where they feel safe. Try to calm and reassure them ("it will pass - the drugs will wear off"). This can take hours, so be patient. If they become panicky or are breathing very fast, get them to control their breathing by slowing it down or breathing into a paper bag. Example: Inhale longer than you exhale by one count.



## Naloxone / NARCAN

If it is an opioid overdose and there is naloxone available, it is legal for you to administer it in an emergency. Once naloxone is administered, call 911, wait for EMS, and provide necessary information to EMS when they arrive. Administer naloxone every 3-5 minutes if the person remains unresponsive. Under Indiana's Aaron's Law, naloxone can be prescribed or given to anyone who may be at risk of unintentional overdose themselves, or any person who might need to respond to a person who has overdosed.



## Chest Pain or Rapid Heart Rate

If they have chest pains, sit them down in a calm environment and reassure them. If the pain continues after a short time or is severe, call an ambulance.

## Overheating

Stimulant drugs (such as ecstasy, cocaine, crack, or meth) raise body temperature. Alcohol makes this worse. If people have taken stimulant drugs, are dancing for long periods, are inside a hot venue, or are outside in the sun, their body can dangerously overheat. If the person is overheating, try to cool them down. Take them outside or somewhere cool, remove outer layers of clothing and use damp cloths across the body, neck, or wrists. DON'T offer ice-cold water. Allow them to sip room temperature water.



## Serotonin Syndrome

Serotonin syndrome is a potentially deadly syndrome triggered by drugs that can cause an overdose of serotonin, including MDMA (ecstasy, Molly), SSRI's (prozac, Lexapro) and SNRI's (Effexor). This can lead to sudden onset of intense suicidal thoughts or behaviors with decreases in impulse control.

The main symptoms are:

- **Unusually rigid, jerky, twitchy movements, often involving the lower legs**
- **Shaking**
- **Fully dilated pupils**
- **Overheating**
- **Shivering**
- **Racing heart**
- **Appearing agitated or confused**

**CALL 9-1-1**  
**if you suspect**  
**Serotonin Syndrome**



## Vomiting

Vomiting is a natural way for the body to purge toxins. If somebody is feeling nauseous, don't give them anything to eat and only let them sip water. Never force someone to drink anything. If after vomiting they want to sleep, let them, but keep them under observation. Make sure they are lying on their side.



## Abnormal Breathing

If they are not breathing or have abnormal or raspy breathing, direct someone near you to call 911 while you start rescue breathing.





**4.** Open their airway by gently tilting their head back and lifting their chin. Check that nothing is blocking their airway.

**3.** Hold the hand and lift up the knee furthest away from you, then turn them on their side by pushing down on their knee.

**2.** Put the arm furthest away from you across the chest, so that the back of the hand rests against the cheek.

**1.** Put the hand closest to you by their head (as if they were waving).

**Recovery Position**  
If they are unconscious, put them in the recovery position (or on their side) and monitor breathing.

### STAY WITH THEM

Stay with them and check on them regularly. If they are very worried or distressed, ensure they are somewhere calm and give reassurance.

### CALL 911

If someone is unconscious, having a seizure, or not breathing normally, call 911.

Give as much information as possible, including location, age, gender, and what has happened. Be honest about what drugs they have taken, if you know.

### MAKE SPACE

If they are having a seizure, keep the area safe and move anything that could hurt them.

If you are in a bar, get someone to stop the music, turn up the lights, and clear space.



**IN AN EMERGENCY,  
ALWAYS CALL 911**

If they open their eyes or gesture, they are responsive. If they do not respond in any way, they need treatment as fast as possible.



**“What happened?”  
“Open your eyes.”**

Are they responsive? Gently shake their shoulders, rub their sternum, and say their name or other phrases to get their attention. Ask them questions:

### Unresponsive

Although Harm Reduction cannot remove the risks associated with taking drugs and drinking alcohol, it can reduce them. A drug-related emergency might affect someone’s physical or mental health. Both should be taken seriously.

A drug-related emergency can happen if a person has a bad reaction to drugs or alcohol, takes different drugs at the same time, takes too much of a drug or injures themselves while under the influence. An emergency can also occur if drugs have triggered an existing health condition.

- **Overdoses of depressant drugs often involve breathing difficulties.**
- **Overdoses of stimulant drugs can involve heart attacks or seizures.**

You may need to do different things to help someone, depending on their appearance and behavior.



If their heart is not beating, start chest compressions as part of CPR. When administering CPR, follow training protocols.

### Circulation



Are they breathing normally? Place your ear above their mouth, looking down at their body. Listen for sounds of breathing and see if you can feel their breath on your cheek. Watch to see if their chest moves. Do this for 10 seconds. If not breathing, perform rescue breaths.

### Breathing



Is the airway open and clear? Open the airway by placing one hand on the forehead and gently tilting the head back to lift the chin with the other hand.

### Airway

## CHECK YOUR A.B.C’S



# DEALING WITH

# DRUG-RELATED EMERGENCIES

**A companion to the City of Bloomington’s  
NARCAN in Every Bar Program**



**Thanks to Our Community Partners for Their Assistance**



**Interested in Overdose Prevention & Harm Reduction  
Training Opportunities?**

Scan the QR Code for  
Harm Reduction Resources from  
Monroe County Health Department



**DON’T DO THESE THINGS**

- Inflict excessive pain to wake them up
- Give them any other drugs
- Encourage them to vomit
- Give them anything to eat or drink (apart from small sips of water)
- Put them in a bath/shower
- Walk them around or attempt to restrain them

**Turn over for our guide to  
spotting signs of a drug  
related emergency**

