



News Release

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CCH now offering a free, lifesaving prescription for people at risk for opioid overdose

For Immediate Release

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – On Aug. 2, Columbus Community Hospital started offering free Narcan nasal spray kits at no cost to people at risk of opioid overdose and their family members and friends.

Narcan, also known as naloxone, is an antidote to opioid overdoses. Opioids are medications that reduce pain sensitivity and activate reward centers in the brain. Common opioids include prescription drugs such as morphine, codeine and oxycodone, and illegal drugs such as heroin.

“Opioids, when used prudently, are a valuable treatment, especially for acutely painful conditions,” said Mark Howerter, MD, emergency department medical director at CCH.

“Chronic use needs to be monitored very carefully, and illicit use is very dangerous.”

While opioids effectively treat pain, the euphoric effect they cause can also lead to opioid abuse, addictions and overdoses.

Opioid overdoses can happen when people deliberately misuse a prescription for opioids; use illegal opioids, such as heroin; knowingly or unknowingly use an opioid contaminated with a more potent opioid such as fentanyl; take opioids with certain medications for the treatment of mental health disorders; or take opioids with other drugs and/or alcohol.

If a person overdoses on opioids, Narcan can be used to stop the opioid’s effects. It works by binding to opioid receptors in the brain, which prevents opioids from binding there. This can temporarily reverse an overdose and save lives. Narcan can only work if opioids are present in the system, so it cannot be abused.

Narcan has been available for use on opioid overdoses since the early 1970s, but back then, it was injectable and only available at hospitals and addiction clinics. The first home kits for Narcan use were made available in the late 1990s.

By 2015, Narcan had started marketing a nasal delivery system that could be used by laypersons to deliver the Narcan immediately for opioid overdoses. That year, Nebraska passed a law that allowed pharmacies to dispense Narcan with or without a prescription to qualifying patients.



The free Narcan nasal spray kits at CCH are being offered through a partnership between the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Pharmacists Association, Region 4 Behavioral Health System and CCH. This partnership is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

Any Nebraska resident is eligible to pick up the free Narcan kits if they are at risk for an overdose or have a friend or loved one who is at risk.

“This program is important because it takes away any financial barrier,” said Josh Jaeger, director of pharmacy at CCH. “It allows patients, friends, family or caregivers to have Narcan available at home at no cost,”

To access a free Narcan nasal spray kit, eligible individuals should call CCH at 402-562-4885 to schedule a pick-up time between 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

When people come to get their prescription, a CCH pharmacist will teach them how to use the Narcan kit, provide a demonstration and give them an educational printout. The pharmacists will also educate people on the risk factors for an opioid overdose and its signs and symptoms, which include:

- Pale face that may be clammy to the touch.
- Limp body.
- Fingernails and/or lips have a blue or purple tint.
- Vomiting and/or gurgling sounds.
- Inability to be wakened from sleep or inability to speak.
- Slow breathing or not breathing.
- Slow heartbeat or no heartbeat.

If someone notices any of these signs and symptoms, it’s important to respond immediately by calling 911 and administering Narcan if they have it and have been trained to do so.

“Since opioid overdoses cause people to stop breathing, the time — less than 5 minutes — to administer the drug is very short to get the patient back neurologically intact,” Howerter said. “Getting the drug to the patient quickly is paramount.”

For more information on the free Narcan kits, call CCH’s pharmacy at 402-562-4885.

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