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Heroin Overdose Antidote Naloxone Becoming More Widely Available

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The heroin overdose antidote naloxone is becoming more widely available nationwide, the *Los Angeles Times* reports.

California greatly expanded availability of the treatment as of January 1. Currently 17 states and the District of Columbia have adopted laws allowing family and friends of people who are addicted to heroin or prescription opioids to have the antidote.

The treatment, sold under the brand name Narcan, has been used for many years by paramedics and doctors in emergency rooms. It is administered by nasal spray. The medication blocks the ability of heroin or opioid painkillers to attach to brain cells. The U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy says it is encouraging police departments to carry Narcan.

Ohio is considering a measure to allow distribution of Narcan, the article notes. Ohio is one of many states that have experienced a surge in heroin use. Much of the increase is driven by people who have switched to heroin from prescription painkillers, because it is much cheaper and easier to obtain than pills such as oxycodone. The state measure would increase naloxone's availability to anyone "in a position to assist an individual who there is reason to believe is at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose."

According to Wilson Compton, Deputy Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, when naloxone is injected into an overdose victim whose heart is still beating, "it's virtually 100 percent effective." When overdose victims are discovered, "they're kind of blue, they're breathing very shallowly, or hardly breathing at all," he said. "If this medication is administered [properly], they wake up within a minute or two. It's remarkable. You save their life."

Last summer, the police department of Quincy, Massachusetts, the first in the nation to require every officer on patrol to carry Narcan, reported a 95 percent success rate with the treatment.