



Harm Reduction for People Who Use Drugs

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WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER



Sarah Wakeman
@DrSarahWakeman

Friend went to dentist & proudly shared she started flossing 5-6x/week. In response, hygienist told her she should be flossing 2x/daily. Friend stopped flossing. This is perfect metaphor for problem w/ “abstinence” only SUD models & why embracing any positive change is so key.

9:22 PM · 2/1/21

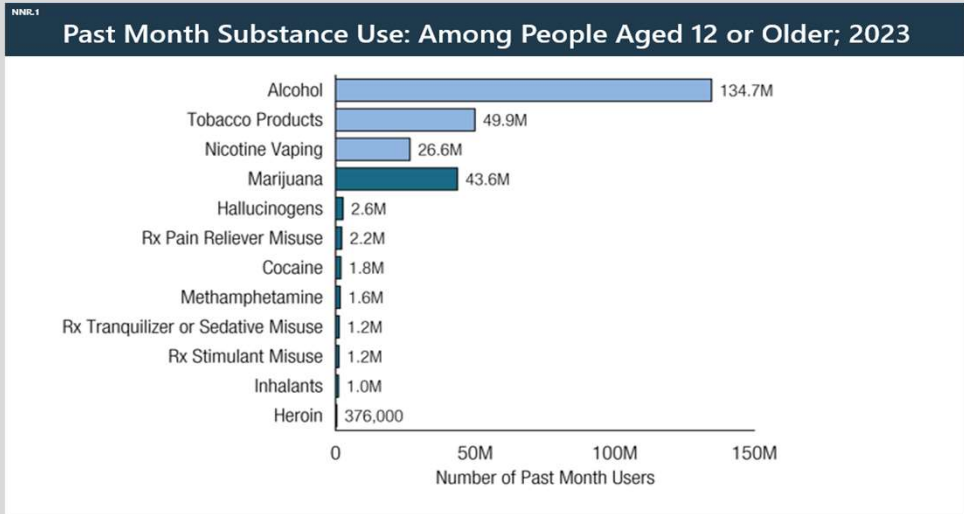
Learning Objectives

- Define Harm Reduction as a philosophy and multilayered set of strategies to promote the health, safety, autonomy, and dignity of people who use drugs (PWUD)
- Identify public health approaches to Harm Reduction
- Describe evidence-based harm reduction strategies to implement immediately in a primary care or hospital medicine practice

Outline

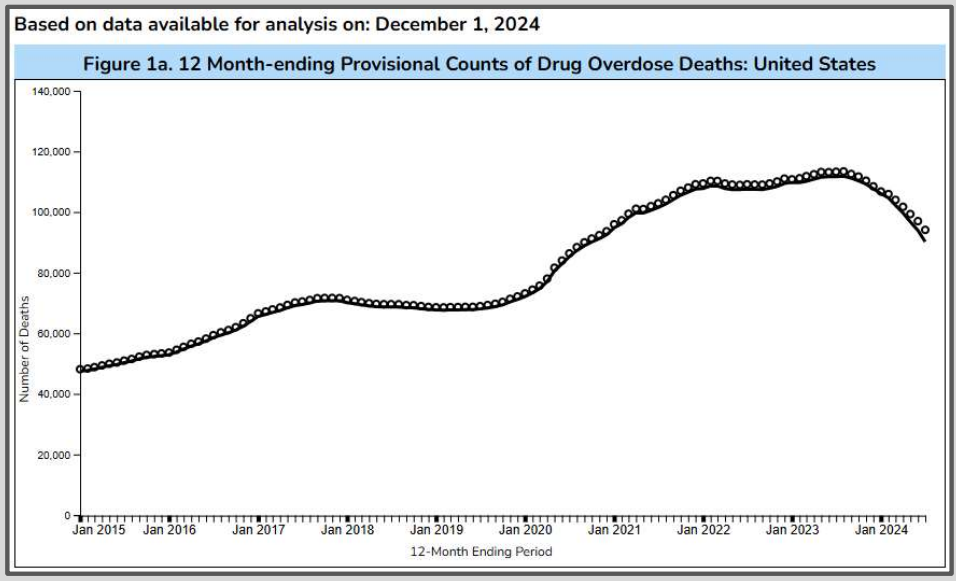
- Overview & Definition
- Public Health Perspectives
- Practical Applications:
 - Alcohol
 - Tobacco
 - Cannabis
 - Opioids
 - People Who Inject Drugs (PWID)

Context – Current Landscape



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP24-07-021, NSDUH Series H-59). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2023-nsduh-annual-national-report>

Context – The Overdose Epidemic



Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Rossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts. National Center for Health Statistics. 2024.

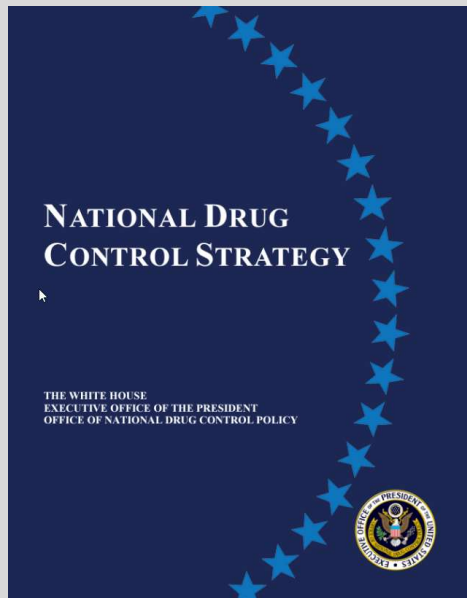
Context – The Overdose Epidemic

"The latest data show that our efforts are working."

DR. RAHUL GUPTA, DIRECTOR
WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL
POLICY

Mann, Brian. "Historic drop in U.S. overdose deaths accelerates as fentanyl crisis eases." NPR. 14 Nov. 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/14/nx-s1-5191743/overdose-deaths-drop-fentanyl-opioid-crisis>.

Context – The Overdose Epidemic

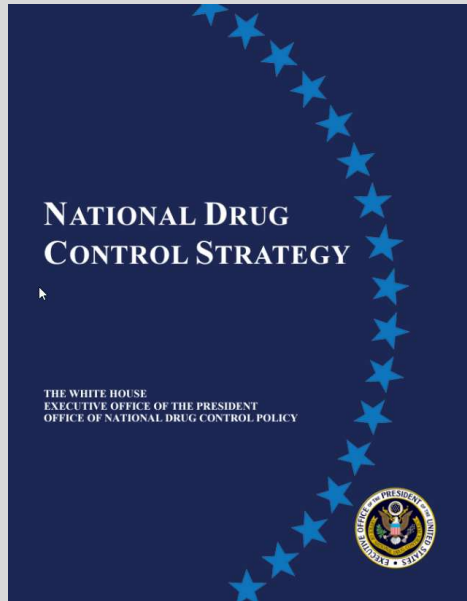


<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf>

Priority Areas:

1. Expanding access to evidence-based treatment, particularly medication for opioid use disorder.
2. Advancing racial equity in our approach to drug policy.
3. Enhancing evidence-based harm reduction efforts.
4. Supporting evidence-based prevention efforts to reduce youth substance use.
5. Reducing the supply of illicit substances.
6. Advancing recovery-ready workplaces and expanding the addiction workforce.
7. Expanding access to recovery support services.

Context – The Overdose Epidemic



<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf>

Priority Areas:

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- ✓ 7. Expanding access to recovery support services.



Harm Reduction - Definition

SAMHSA defines harm reduction as a practical and transformative approach that incorporates community-driven public health strategies — including prevention, risk reduction, and health promotion — to empower PWUD and their families with the choice to live healthier, self-directed, and purpose-filled lives. Harm reduction centers the lived and living experience of PWUD, especially those in underserved communities, in these strategies and the practices that flow from them.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Harm Reduction Framework. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023.

Harm Reduction - Examples



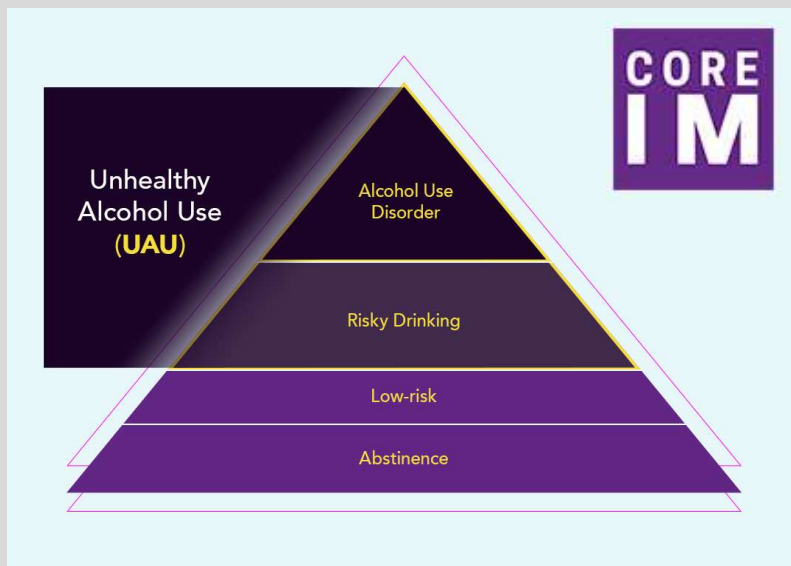
WHAT'S HARM REDUCTION?

| | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Bike Helmets | Designated Driver |
| Face Masks | Methodone |
| Naloxone | Nicotine Patch |
| Syringe Exchange | Safety Belts |
| Speed Limits | Sunscreen |

ALL OF THE ABOVE!

<https://www.safeproject.us/resource/the-truth-about-harm-reduction/>

Important Concept



**SUBSTANCE
USE**

≠

**SUBSTANCE
USE
DISORDER**

Lawrence K, **Fried M**, Trivedi S. "5 Pearls on Unhealthy Alcohol Use." *Core IM podcast*. July 11, 2018

Important Concept

~~People with Substance Use Disorders Don't Care About Their Health~~

Gregg MD PhD, Jessica. "'Dangerous,' 'Bad,' and 'Weak': Stigma and the Care of Patients with Addictions." *OHSU News*, 9 May 2018, news.ohsu.edu/2018/05/09/dangerous-bad-and-weak-stigma-and-the-care-of-patients-with-addictions. Accessed 29 Dec. 2024

Outline

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- Practical Applications:
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Public Health Perspectives

Syringe Service Programs & Safe Injection Sites



Overdose Prevention Hotlines



Syringe Service Programs (SSPs)

Premise: IV Drug Use (IVDU) is a Major Risk for HIV and Hep C

SSPs distribute free, new, sterile syringes to PWID

Evidence-Based Approach

Also offer low-barrier healthcare

Legal hurdles



The Pew Charitable Trusts. *Syringe Distribution Programs Can Improve Public Health During the Opioid Overdose Crisis*. The Pew Charitable Trusts, Mar. 2021, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2021/03/syringe-distribution-programs-can-improve-public-health-during-the-opioid-overdose-crisis>.

Supervised Injection Sites

Legal outside of US since 1986

All the benefits of SSP and more!

Tremendously successful



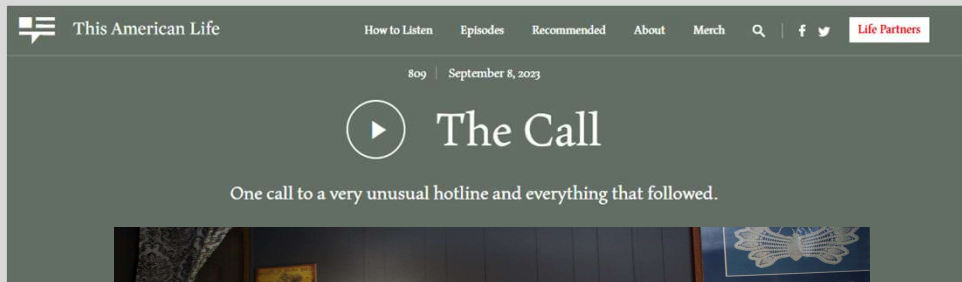
Finke, Jorge, and Jie Chan. "The case for supervised injection sites in the United States." *American Family Physician* 105.5 (2022): 454-455.
Greenwald, G. (2023). *Overdose prevention centers: A successful strategy for preventing death and disease* (Briefing Paper No. 146). Cato Institute.
<https://www.cato.org/briefing-paper/overdose-prevention-centers-successful-strategy-preventing-death-disease>

Overdose Prevention Hotlines



Matskiv, G., Marshall, T., Krieg, O., Viste, D., & Ghosh, S. M. (2022). Virtual overdose monitoring services: a novel adjunctive harm reduction approach for addressing the overdose crisis. *CMAJ*, 194(46), E1568-E1572.

Overdose Prevention Hotlines



Outline



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- ✓ Public Health Perspectives
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SBIRT

Screening **B**rief **I**ntervention **R**eferral to **T**reatment

Harm Reduction for Alcohol Use

1. Provide education about standard drink & recommended limits

| STANDARD DRINK EQUIVALENTS | APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS IN: |
|--|--|
| BEER or WINE COOLER | |
| 12 oz.  5% alcohol | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 oz. = 1 16 oz. = 1.3 22 oz. = 2 40 oz. = 3.3 |
| MALT LIQUOR / MICROBREWS | |
| 8-9 oz.  7% alcohol | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 oz. = 1.5 16 oz. = 2 22 oz. = 2.5 40 oz. = 4.5 |

| STANDARD DRINK EQUIVALENTS | APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS IN: |
|---|--|
| TABLE WINE | |
| 5 oz.  12% alcohol | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a 750-mL (25-oz.) bottle = 5 |
| 80-PROOF SPIRITS (hard liquor) | |
| 1.5 oz.  40% alcohol | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a mixed drink = 1 or more* a pint (16 oz.) = 11 a fifth (25 oz.) = 17 1.75 L (59 oz.) = 39 <p><small>*Note: Depending on factors such as the type of spirits and the recipe, one mixed drink can contain from one to three standard drinks.</small></p> |

Heavy Drinking



5 or more drinks on any day

15 or more drinks per week



4 or more drinks on any day

8 or more drinks per week

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (n.d.). *Alcohol and drinking patterns*. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-drinking-patterns>
Ohio State University. (n.d.). *Resources: Stop unhealthy substance use*. Retrieved January 5, 2025, from <https://u.osu.edu/stopunhealthysubstanceuse/resources/>

Harm Reduction for Alcohol Use

2. Track Drinking

| Date | Wine | Beer | Strong Beer | Liquor | Total # of Drinks |
|----------------------|------|------|-------------|--------|-------------------|
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| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Weekly Total: | | | | | |

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (n.d.). *Alcohol and drinking patterns*. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-drinking-patterns>
Ohio State University. (n.d.). *Resources: Stop unhealthy substance use*. Retrieved January 5, 2025, from <https://u.osu.edu/stopunhealthysubstanceuse/resources/>

Harm Reduction for Alcohol Use

3. Managing Triggers



Ohio State University. (n.d.). *Resources: Stop unhealthy substance use*. Retrieved January 5, 2025, from <https://u.osu.edu/stopunhealthysubstanceuse/resources/>

Harm Reduction for Alcohol Use

4. Pacing

- One alcohol-containing drink per hour
- Alternate non-alcohol drinks

5. Planning

- Commit to certain drinking days per week; drinks per day
- Purchase non-alcohol options
- Eat before and during drinking

Ohio State University. (n.d.). *Resources: Stop unhealthy substance use*. Retrieved January 5, 2025, from <https://u.osu.edu/stopunhealthysubstanceuse/resources/>

Harm Reduction for Alcohol Use

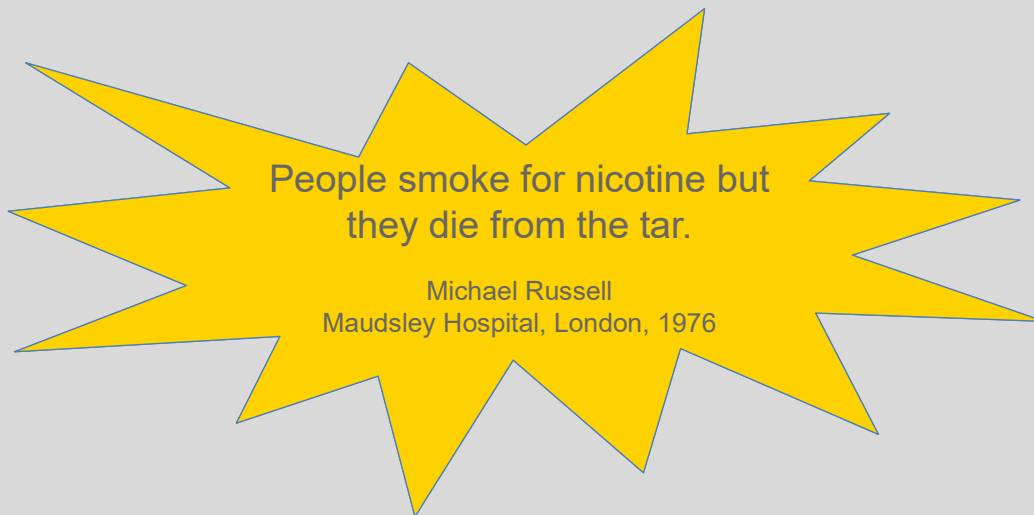
6. Breast Milk Test Strips

7. Medications for Alcohol Use Disorder

- Naltrexone
- Acamprosate
- Disulfiram

Partnership to End Addiction. (n.d.). *Harm reduction strategies for alcohol*. Partnership to End Addiction. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://drugfree.org/article/harm-reduction-strategies-for-alcohol/>

Tobacco-Specific Harm Reduction



Russell, M. A. (1976). Low-tar medium-nicotine cigarettes: a new approach to safer smoking. *Br Med J*, 1(6023), 1430-1433.
O'Leary, Renée, and Riccardo Polosa. "Tobacco harm reduction in the 21st century." *Drugs and Alcohol Today* 20.3 (2020): 219-234.

Tobacco-Specific Harm Reduction

1. FDA-Approved or FDA-Authorized options
 - Nicotine Replacement Therapy
 - General Snus
 - IQOS
2. E-cigarettes
3. Nicotine pouches

Hatsukami, D. K., & Carroll, D. M. (2020). Tobacco harm reduction: past history, current controversies and a proposed approach for the future. *Preventive medicine*, 140, 106099.
Antin, T. M., Hunt, G., & Annehino, R. (2021). Tobacco harm reduction as a path to restore trust in tobacco control. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(11), 5560.
U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (n.d.). *FDA renews authorization for 8 General Snus products to be marketed with reduced-risk claim*. Retrieved January 5, 2025, from <https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/fda-renews-authorization-8-general-snus-products-be-marketed-reduced-risk-claim>

Cannabis-Specific Harm Reduction

Consume less harmful formulations

How you consumer matters

When you smoke matters

Why you smoke matters

Cannabis-Specific Harm Reduction

Consume less harmful formulations

Reduce or cut out tobacco as a mixing agent.

Know your source – from regulated or unregulated market?

Avoid oils, waxes, or dabs

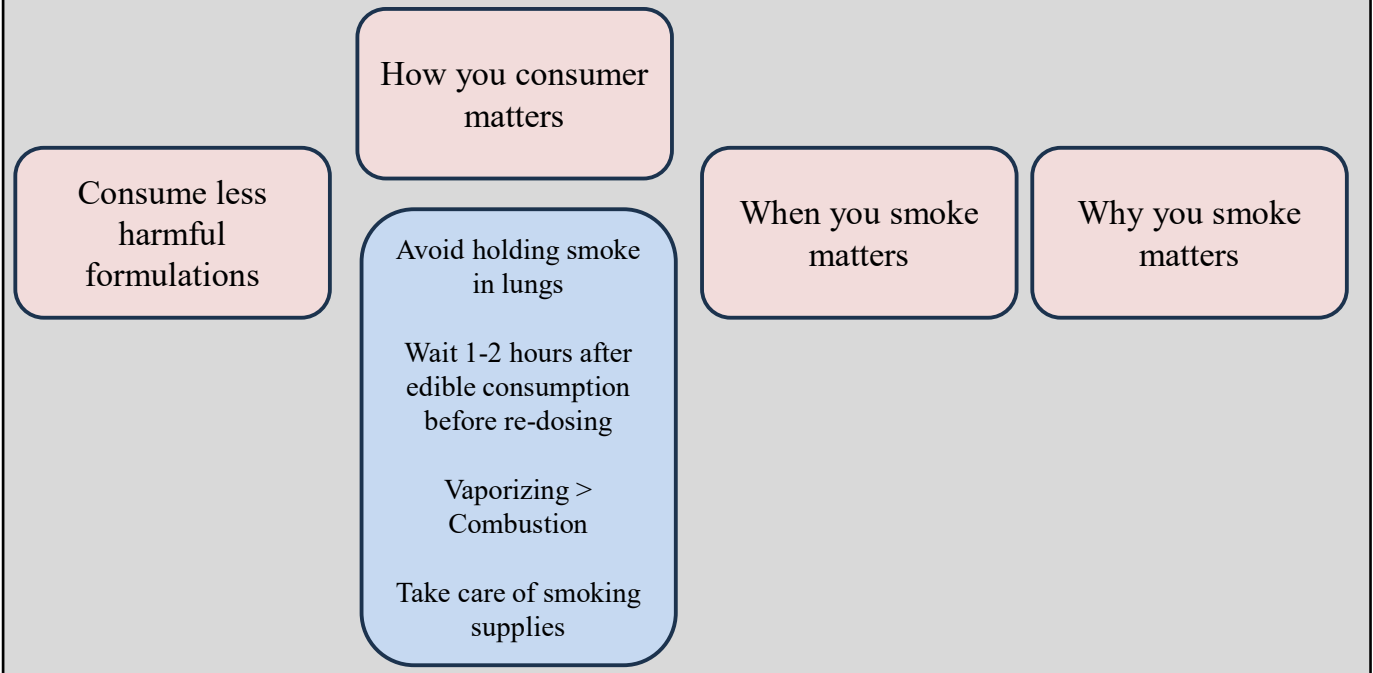
Avoid K2/spice

How you consumer matters

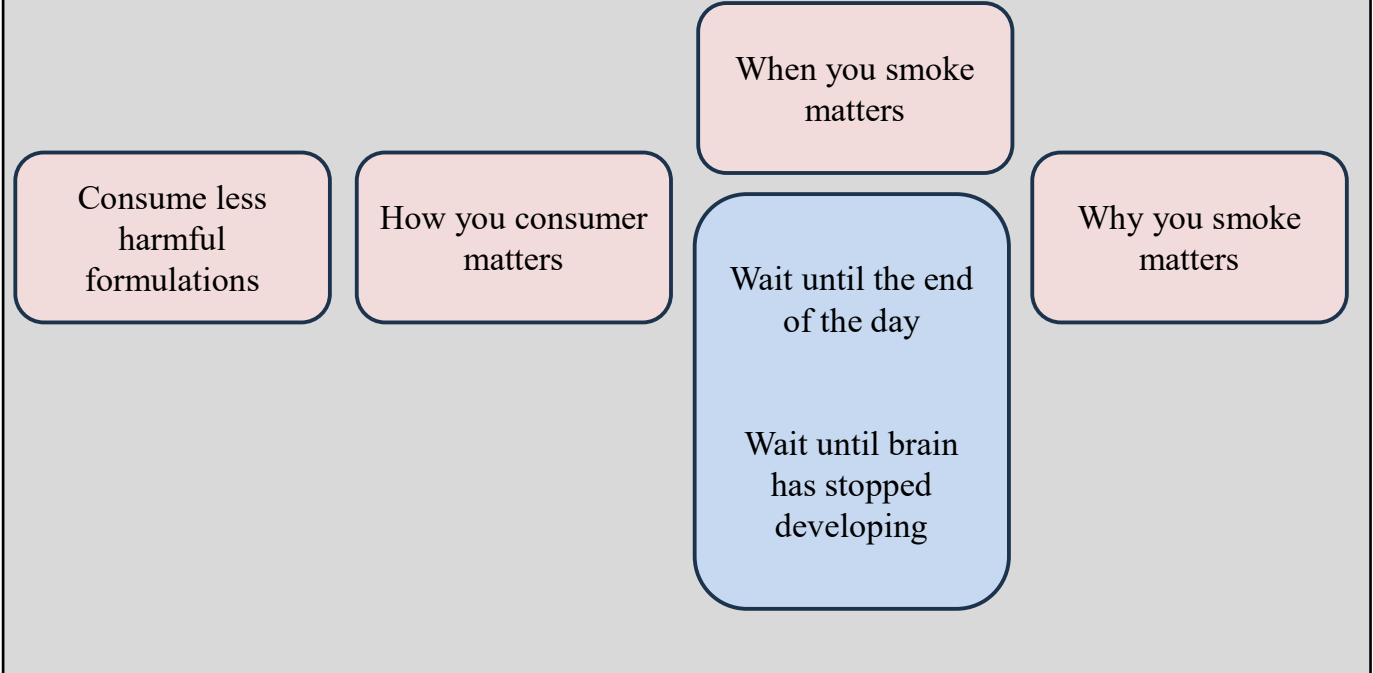
When you smoke matters

Why you smoke matters

Cannabis-Specific Harm Reduction



Cannabis-Specific Harm Reduction



Cannabis-Specific Harm Reduction

Why you smoke matters

Consume less harmful formulations

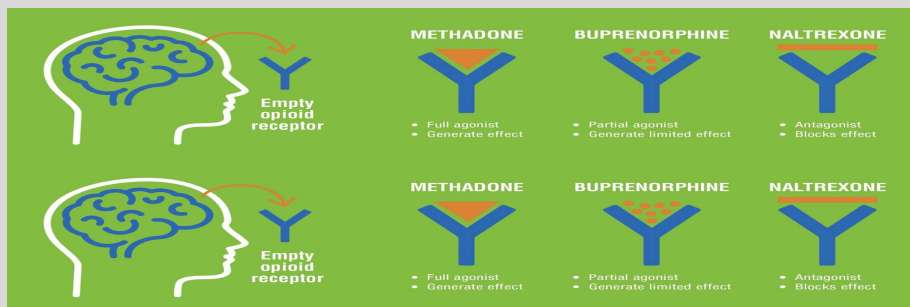
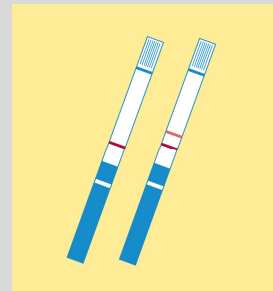
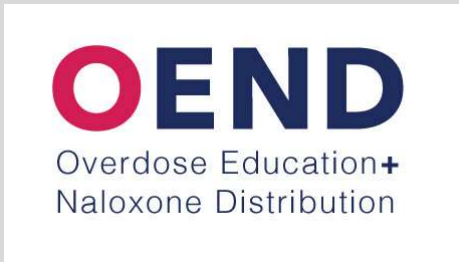
How you consumer matters

When you smoke matters

Cannabis almost certainly has a detrimental effect on the mental health

There is definitely a cannabis withdrawal syndrome

Opioid-Specific Harm Reduction



Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution (OEND)

Community Naloxone Training

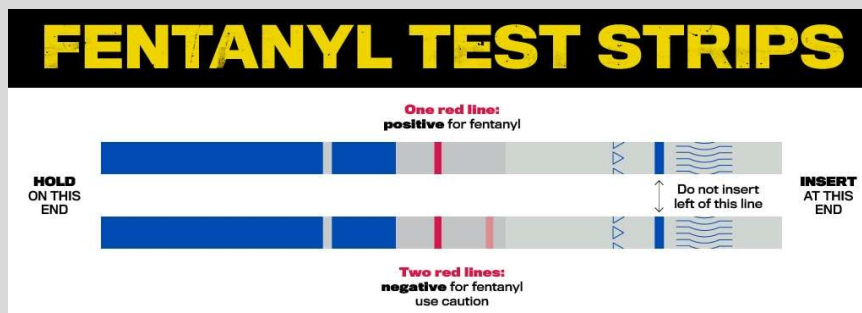
Led by Franklin County Public Health, this 1-hour training will empower you with life-saving tools. Learn about substance use disorders and the different types of opioids, how to identify signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose, and how to administer naloxone (also referred to as Narcan).

At the completion of the training, participants will receive a free naloxone kit to take with them

This program is offered in partnership with Franklin County Public Health, the Upper Arlington Public Library, and UA CARES.

Recommended for students, parents/caregivers, and community members age 14+.

Test Strips: Fentanyl and Xylazine



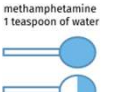



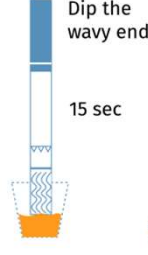

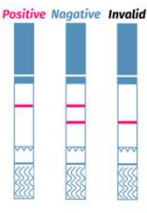
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Overdose prevention: Safety tips for you, your family, and your friends*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://www.cdc.gov/stop-overdose/safety/index.html>

Test Strips: Fentanyl and Xylazine

How to use fentanyl test strips

10 mg of drugs + Water → Clean containers

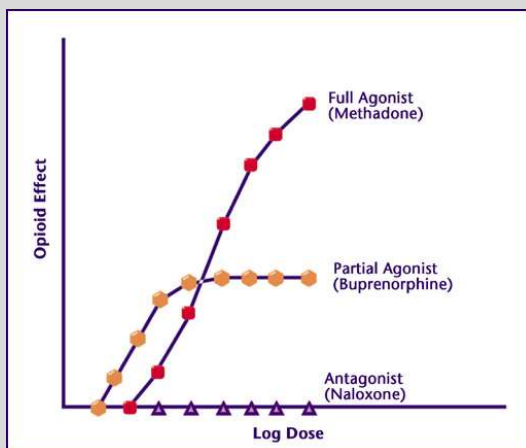
 enough to cover Lincoln's hair on a penny
 1/16 of a teaspoon
 methamphetamine 1 teaspoon of water
 others 1/2 teaspoon of water

 Dip the wavy end 15 sec
 Lay it down on flat surface 3-5 min
 Read the result Positive Negative Invalid

MISSION LOCAL

Mission Local. (2023, March). *Where to get fentanyl test strips and Narcan in the Mission*. Mission Local. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://missionlocal.org/2023/03/where-to-get-fentanyl-test-strips-and-narcan-in-the-mission/>

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)



Imperfect fit – Limited opioid effect

Opioids replaced and blocked by buprenorphine.
 Buprenorphine competes with the full agonist opioids for the receptor. Since buprenorphine has a higher affinity (stronger binding ability) it expels existing opioids and blocks others from attaching. As a partial agonist, the buprenorphine has a limited opioid effect, enough to stop withdrawal but not enough to cause intense euphoria.

Sumat Centers. (n.d.). *Buprenorphine treatment*. Sumat Centers. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://www.sumatcenters.com/buprenorphine1>
 National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment. (n.d.). *A technical explanation of buprenorphine*. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from https://www.naabt.org/education/technical_explanation_buprenorphine.cfm

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Drug and Alcohol Dependence

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/drugalcdp

ELSEVIER

Full length article

Overdose following initiation of naltrexone and buprenorphine medication treatment for opioid use disorder in a United States commercially insured cohort

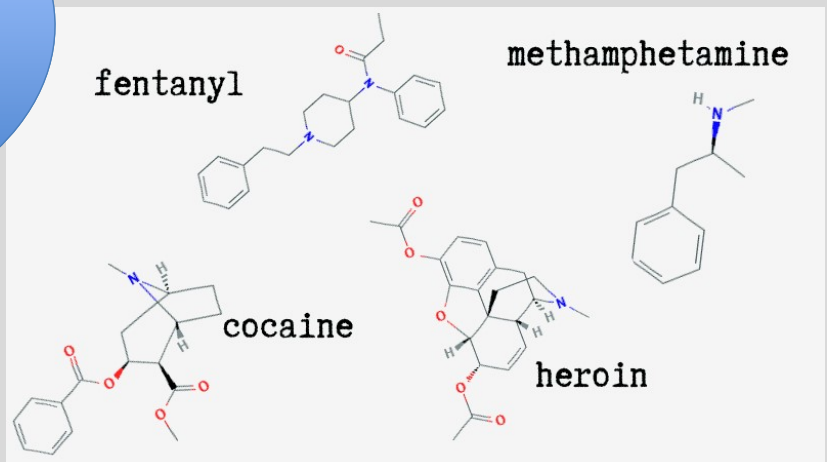
Jake R. Morgan^{a,*}, Bruce R. Schackman^b, Zoe M. Weinstein^c, Alexander Y. Walley^c, Benjamin P. Linas^{a,d}

Check for updates

Morgan, J. R., Schackman, B. R., Weinstein, Z. M., Walley, A. Y., & Linas, B. P. (2019). Overdose following initiation of naltrexone and buprenorphine medication treatment for opioid use disorder in a United States commercially insured cohort. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 200, 34-39.

Harm Reduction for PWID

Ask your patients about how they inject drugs



Harm Reduction for PWID

Step 1: Preparation

Step 2: Safer Injection

Step 3: Aftercare

Harm Reduction for PWID

Step 1: Preparation

Step 2: Safer Injection

Step 3: Aftercare

- Choose Safe Location
- Reliable Companion (or hotline)
- Gather clean needle, syringe, cotton (filter)
- Use test strips
- Use sterile water and vitamin C to dissolve in clean cooker

Harm Reduction for PWID

Step 1: Preparation

Step 2: Safer Injection

Step 3: Aftercare

- Use tourniquet to find vein – rotate sites on both sides
- Clean skin with alcohol swab
- Insert needle with bevel up
- Pull back plunger to ensure in vein
- Remove tourniquet

Harm Reduction for PWID

Step 1: Preparation

Step 2: Safer Injection

Step 3: Aftercare

- Have naloxone ready
- Apply topical antibiotic and bandage
- If vein was missed apply warm compress
- Seek care if you are feeling sick

Summary

- Harm Reduction is a multilayered set of strategies to promote the health, safety, autonomy, and dignity of people who use drugs (PWUD)
- There are numerous public health approaches to reduce harm in substance use including syringe service programs, safe injection sites, and overdose prevention hotlines
- Physicians can employ many strategies from the primary care office or hospital room to reduce harm in the use of many substances.