

Saving Lives in Texas: The Facts on Polysubstance Use

Understanding substance use, and which substances are commonly used, helps communities respond with care. Take action early and focus on support where it's needed most to reduce harm and save lives.

Polysubstance Use and Why It's Dangerous

Polysubstance use occurs when two or more substances are taken together or within a short time frame. This may be done to change or intensify a drug's effects. Other times, it happens without a person's knowledge when a drug is mixed with another substance, such as fentanyl.

Mixing substances, whether opioids, stimulants, depressants or alcohol, is never safe. Their combined effects can be unpredictable and sometimes deadly. When substances are mixed, even lifesaving medications like naloxone may not work as expected.

Mixing Stimulants and Depressants

Combining stimulants and depressants does not balance or cancel out their effects. Their interactions can modify or mask one or both drugs, increasing overdose risk.

Stimulants (drugs that raise heart rate and blood pressure):

Prescription medications for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), ecstasy (MDMA), cocaine, and methamphetamine or other amphetamines, such as speed.

Depressants (drugs that slow breathing and lower heart rate):

Opioids such as heroin, morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone and fentanyl, as well as benzodiazepines, xylazine and alcohol.



TxOpioidResponse.org

Where to Find Help

Naloxone, Treatment and Recovery Resources

Learn how to use naloxone in an emergency, find treatment and recovery resources, and get tools to help you start conversations about the risks of opioids:

TxOpioidResponse.org

Preventing Opioid Overdose

Find information and resources to help understand overdose risks, prevent overdoses and support people in getting care and treatment:

[CDC.gov/Overdose-Prevention/Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/Overdose-Prevention/Prevention)

Preventing Stimulant Overdose

Learn about stimulant overdoses, including risk factors and links to prevention strategies and support resources:

[CDC.gov/Overdose-Prevention/About/Stimulant-Overdose](https://www.cdc.gov/Overdose-Prevention/About/Stimulant-Overdose)

Drinking Alcohol While Using Other Drugs

Mixing alcohol with other substances raises the risk of overdose and can cause serious harm to the brain, heart and other organs.

Most Common Drug Combinations in Texas Overdose Deaths

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services Center for Health Statistics, polysubstance use has increased from 2012 to 2024.* In 2024, the most common combinations involved:

1. Opioids and stimulants.
2. Opioids and benzodiazepines.
3. Multiple opioids.
4. Opioids and alcohol.

*Based on the decedent's county of residence listed on the death certificate.



How to Respond to an Overdose

Opioid overdoses often involve slowed or stopped breathing and small pupils. The person is often unconscious and unresponsive.

Stimulant overdoses, also known as “overamping,” can occur while a person remains conscious and often involve dangerous overheating, severe agitation or confusion. They may also include seizures, cardiac events or psychosis.

Both types of overdoses can lead to severe physical or neurological harm or death. **Always call 911 immediately.**

Responding to an Opioid Overdose

Naloxone will not harm someone if opioids are not present in their system, so it's always best to use it if you're worried it may be an overdose.

Steps to follow:

- **Call 911 right away.**
- **Try to wake the person up.**
- **Tilt the person's head back and give naloxone, if available.**
Naloxone will reverse an opioid overdose, even if the person remains sedated due to xylazine or medetomidine. Keeping naloxone on hand could mean the difference between life and death for you or someone else.
- **Begin rescue breathing or CPR, if needed.**
- **If the person is breathing on their own, place them on their side to prevent choking.** Do not interrupt rescue breathing or CPR to do this unless the person vomits and their airway needs to be cleared.
- **Stay with the person until emergency services arrive.**

Responding to a Stimulant Overdose

- **Heart attack:** If the person is unconscious and not breathing, begin CPR.
- **Seizure:** Protect their head, place them on their left side, and don't put anything in their mouth.
- **Overheating or heat stroke:** Cool them with cold towels, fans, ice packs or water. Move the person to a cool area and remove any outer clothing.
- **Mental health crisis:** Try to create a calm, quiet environment until help arrives.

