



CRISIS + EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION (CERC) IN RESPONSE TO AN OPIOID OVERDOSE EVENT

1. Be First

Surveillance informs public health officials early when opioid overdoses are increasing and helps determine priority messages, target audiences, and best ways to get messages out in a timely manner.

- Share messages on the signs of an overdose and life-saving actions.
- Include local information on emergency contacts and naloxone availability and administration.
- Engage at-risk populations through targeted messaging.

2. Be Right

The right **community response** and messaging varies in every opioid overdose event. “Know your epidemic, know your response,” reminds us to respond according to who is being affected and how.

- Include the public in message development.
- Meet with at-risk populations and stakeholders to learn about their perspectives, barriers to care, and realistic actions they will take.

3. Be Credible

Opioid responses require several partners to work together (such as law enforcement, public health, and hospital systems). Make sure the public is hearing information from the appropriate experts.

- Differences in messaging can lead to confusion and distrust. Ensure all responding agencies are providing the same information and same instructions to the public.
- Consider choosing a spokesperson from your community to help relate with target populations— for example, someone in recovery from opioid use disorder (addiction) or who has experienced an overdose.

CERC'S SIX PRINCIPLES

1. Be First.

The first source of information often becomes the preferred source. Communicating information quickly is crucial.

2. Be Right.

Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill the gaps.

3. Be Credible.

Honesty and truthfulness cannot be compromised in a crisis.

4. Express Empathy.

Acknowledge what people are feeling in words to build trust and rapport.

5. Promote Action.

Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety and promotes a sense of control.

6. Show Respect.

Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable.



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury
Prevention and Control



www.cdc.gov/opioids/opioid-rapid-response-teams.html

4. Express Empathy

Demonstrate understanding of the personal challenges of overdose and addiction to help open the door to collaboration with those at risk and affected.

- Listen first to understand the needs and concerns of the affected community.
- Acknowledge that seeing or experiencing an overdose is frightening.
- Acknowledge the courage it takes to come forward for help and that recovery can be a long and difficult process.



5. Promote Action

Public health responses start in the community. **Give people actions** they can take to prevent opioid overdoses. Action messages can include:

- Learn the signs of overdose and how to respond.
- If you are prescribed opioids, only take medication as directed by your doctor and **dispose of unused medication** properly.
- Share information about opioid overdose prevention with neighbors, family, and community.

6. Show Respect

Like any crisis, people affected by opioid addiction and overdose deserve healthy lives. Opioid misuse is complex, and addiction is not a moral failing.

- Combat stigma associated with drug overdose and addiction through public education and people-first messaging (for example, use “person with an opioid use disorder” instead of “addict”).
- Do not dismiss peoples’ concerns. Give people a chance to talk and ask questions.
- Know the facts and sensitivities around opioid use and misuse. Never assume to know the path that leads to an overdose; it is different for every individual.

