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Naloxone – Public Briefing

Briefing No. 17



September 2024



Summary

The Authority previously published a factsheet on the carriage of Naloxone by Police Scotland in October 2021. This briefing provides an update on the progress made following the publication of this briefing.

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a lawful first aid intervention which is a temporary antidote to opioid/opiate overdose, it reverses the effects of overdose if used within a short period of time.

The World Health Organisation state any person who is likely to witness or come into contact with a person with a suspected overdose should carry naloxone.

"The efficacy of naloxone is not in dispute. Naloxone is a WHO-recommended medicine, and efficacy has been proven in several published studies and pilots. Naloxone is a safe, effective drug, with no dependence-forming potential." [Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs](#)

In 2005 Naloxone Hydrochloride was added to the list of medicines in Schedule 19 to the Human Medicines Regulations 2012. This means that Naloxone can be legally administered by persons other than doctors, dentists etc, provided this is for the purpose of saving someone's life in an emergency.

Why is Naloxone used in policing?

In 2020, the number of drug misuse deaths in Scotland increased by 5% compared to the previous year (1,264 in 2019 to 1,339 in 2020). 87% of these deaths were related to opioid overdose. This figure represents the highest number since records began in 1996, and is double the amount of deaths 10 years prior (in 2009, [545 drug-related deaths were recorded](#)). To address this, the Scottish Government launched the [National Drugs Deaths Mission](#) and [Drugs Deaths Taskforce](#), now known as [National Drugs Mission Oversight Group](#).

To address the impact of drug related deaths, other countries such as the USA and Australia have equipped first responders (who are not healthcare professionals) with Naloxone. Police officers can often be [first responders](#) in situations where an individual has overdosed.

One of the duties of a constable under section 20(1) of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 is to protect life. Section 32, which sets out the policing principles, provides that the main purpose of policing is to improve the safety and wellbeing of persons, localities and communities in Scotland. These provisions are consistent with the "right to life" under article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which was incorporated into UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998.

Recognising these legal obligations and the impact of significant rates of drug deaths in Scotland, Police Scotland established the [Naloxone Delivery Steering Group](#) in March 2020. This followed a proposal for a Test of Change (ToC) exercise for the carriage of Naloxone by officers.

The implementation of the carriage of Naloxone by Police Scotland

The Naloxone ToC was conducted over a six-month period between March and October 2021, with [three areas initially identified across Scotland](#) with a fourth identified a month into the ToC:

- C Division – Falkirk
- G Division – Dundee City
- G Division – Glasgow East
- N Division – Caithness

All officers from the rank of Police Constable, up to and including the rank of Police Inspector were required to complete the mandatory naloxone training to ensure they were equipped with the knowledge and skills to administer naloxone in the event of an opioid overdose. However, the carriage of naloxone remained a voluntary decision through the ToC, allowing officers to choose whether or not to have it equipped to their utility belt on duty.

An [evaluation](#) of the ToC was conducted by the Scottish Institute for Policing Research in February 2022. One of the recommendations from the evaluation report was the carriage of Naloxone should be rolled out nationally across Scotland, supported by in-depth training, to improve the understanding of problematic drugs use and to reduce stigma. The carriage of Naloxone by officers was welcomed by both community and strategic stakeholders.

Following this evaluation, the Chief Constable committed to a [national roll out of Naloxone](#). Beginning in August 2022, Police Scotland began this 12-month roll out plan. [As of August 2023](#), 12,500 officers, in both local and national divisions, within Police Scotland had completed the necessary training. This equates to [12,500 front line officers](#) in both local and national teams. Naloxone is now part of the standard issue kit for these officers.

After completing the initial Naloxone training course, officers receive an annual refresher course and their equipment is quality assured. Alongside the practical training on the use of Naloxone, probationers receive training focusing on stigma surrounding drug use.

The Scottish Police Federation (SPF) [voiced concerns](#) on the carriage of Naloxone by officers, specifically relating to demands faced by officers and the potential legal consequences that could be experienced by officers administering Naloxone.

Despite these initial concerns, federated officers are supportive of the use of Naloxone. This followed attendance at Naloxone Steering Group and face-to-face training session, where the SPF was sighted on all aspects of the national rollout. The SPF now support the use of Naloxone, recognising its life saving value. Following the announcement of the national roll out, the SPF confirmed that any officer who administers Naloxone will receive support from the SPF.

Police Scotland have reported that officers request to be equipped with Naloxone, and that officers are ["eager"](#) to be equipped with Naloxone. In addition, it has been reported that officers involved in the test of change [valued the inclusion of Naloxone in the standard issue kit](#).

The use of Naloxone by Police in England and Wales

In England and Wales, [29 police forces equip their officers with Naloxone](#). The first force to [trial the carriage of Naloxone by officers](#) was West Midlands Police.

Whilst national data on the carriage of Naloxone by officers in England and Wales is not yet available, some high level data includes:

- North Yorkshire has trained [more than 250 officers](#) on the carriage of Naloxone
- In December 2023, South Wales Police reported [its 50th administration of Naloxone](#) by an officer. More than 500 officers in the force volunteered to carry Naloxone.

Oversight and assurance

In 2023, 1,172 drug misuse deaths [were reported in Scotland](#). This represents a 12% (121) increase in deaths on the previous year. This is the second lowest number of deaths recorded since 2017, however this means that Scotland has the [highest number of drug related deaths in Europe](#). Opiates and opioids were implicated in 80% of these deaths. This increase in deaths highlights the importance of the continued availability and use of Naloxone.

Police Scotland regularly report publicly on the use of Naloxone by its officers. By 30 August 2023, there were [325 recorded incidents](#). In all but eight instances, those who were administered Naloxone survived.



Police Scotland have detailed the use of Naloxone by officers to the Authority's [People Committee](#), and precautions that officers may need to consider when administering Naloxone.

The Authority first published a factsheet on Naloxone in [October 2021](#).

Conclusion and Next Steps

The use of Naloxone by Police Scotland officers provides an innovative approach to tackling the impact of drugs misuse deaths in Scotland.

Police Scotland continue to monitor its use by officers, and the Authority will continue to provide oversight and assurance of the administration of Naloxone by officers.

Keeping up to date

To keep up to date with our work, please keep an eye on the Scottish Police Authority's [website](#) where you can find papers and watch livestream committee discussions, and follow us on Twitter/X:

@ScotPolAuth @policescotland

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Purpose of these Public Briefings

The Strategic Police Plan commits to the provision of Policing for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland. This requires designing and maintaining services which meet rising and evolving demands in a constantly changing environment. To meet these demands, now and in the future, Scotland's police service must adapt and proportionately adopt the necessary technologies which will enable them to protect the safety and wellbeing of our communities (as outlined in the Policing Principles - Section 32 of Police and Fire Reform Act 2012).

This series of public focused and user-friendly public briefings has been developed to provide an overview of the benefits of emerging technology and upcoming developments within policing, the policies that will govern them, and the ethical, privacy and human rights implications.