

# Wisconsin Crime Prevention Practitioners Association

## Emerging Drug Threats

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## Heroin

With the recent increase in heroin use, and heroin related deaths throughout Wisconsin it is important for the community to become more educated in the recognition of heroin, its use, related items of paraphernalia, and the signs and symptoms of possible heroin overdoses.

### What is heroin

Heroin is processed from morphine, a naturally occurring opiate extracted from the seedpod of certain varieties of poppies. Street heroin is rarely pure and may range from a white to dark brown powder of varying consistency. Such differences typically reflect the impurities remaining from the manufacturing process and/or the presence of additional substances. These "cuts" are often sugar, starch, powdered milk and occasionally other drugs, which are added to provide filler.

### How is it used

Heroin can be smoked, snorted, or injected. Typically it is dissolved and injected. A heroin user's drug kit will typically contain a tourniquet, syringe, tin candle cup, lighter, spoon and small cotton balls.

Heroin is packaged for sale in either small pieces of paper or tin foil that are folded in a way to contain the drug called bindles.

### What are the dangers

Heroin is an extremely addictive drug and is associated with a number of serious health conditions, including fatal overdose, spontaneous abortion, and infectious diseases like hepatitis and HIV. Chronic users may develop collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, constipation and gastrointestinal cramping, and liver or kidney disease. Pulmonary complications, including various types of pneumonia, may result from the poor health of the user as well as from heroin's effects on breathing.

### Signs of use

Heroin produces a "downer" effect that rapidly induces a state of relaxation and euphoria. Like other opiates, heroin use blocks the brain's ability to perceive pain. Heroin abusers, particularly those with prior history of drug abuse, may initially be able to conceal signs and symptoms of their heroin use. Some signs include shortness of breath, dry mouth, small pupils, disorientation, droopy appearance and cycles of hyper alertness followed by nodding off.

### Reversing an Overdose

In the 1960's a drug called naloxone was developed to counter the overdose effects of opiates. The drug is more commonly known as it's brand name of Narcan. The drug can be administered either intramuscular with a needle or intranasal with a spray. How it works is that the naloxone 'knocks' the opiate off the receptors in the brain, allowing the brain to take over again.

