



NSW Police Force

DRUG OVERDOSE



Guidelines for police

Introduction

The NSW Police Force supports and operates within the *National Drug Strategy 2017–2026*. This Framework is based on a harm minimisation approach to illicit drugs.

There are three broad types of activities encompassed by the harm minimisation approach:

- ▶ **Supply control** – strategies designed to disrupt the production and supply of illicit drugs
- ▶ **Demand reduction** – strategies designed to prevent or delay the uptake of harmful drug use or to reduce drug use and
- ▶ **Harm reduction** – strategies designed to reduce or delay drug related harm for communities and individuals.

Preservation of life is a law enforcement priority. Fear of prosecution for minor drug use and possession offences among people present at the scene of a drug overdose has been identified as contributing to a reluctance to call an ambulance. Police should exercise their discretion in relation to minor drug offences when attending incidents of drug overdose with the aim of removing this reluctance. Calling an ambulance immediately can save a person's life.

Attendance at incidents of non-fatal drug overdose

When you attend the scene of a non-fatal drug overdose you are encouraged to exercise your discretion to not take action for self administration offences and minor possession offences for the victim and anyone else at the scene. Exercising your discretion might remove the fear of prosecution and encourage people present at overdoses to call for assistance without delay.

Your primary role is to ensure the safety of ambulance officers, the victim and anyone else at the scene. You are to seize any prohibited drug which is obviously present and deal with it as per normal exhibit procedures. After you have obtained brief particulars, it is usually appropriate to leave.

In exercising your discretion, you will obviously consider the circumstances of each case.

To ensure accountability, record your attendance on COPS. Select 'Associated factor' – 'Drug related' – and the further classification 'Non fatal drug overdose'. Record any exercise of your discretion in the narrative.

Contact your duty officer if you are in doubt about this guideline.

Attendance at incidents of fatal drug overdose

At a fatal drug overdose or where death is imminent from a drug overdose, investigate the matter as for any other sudden or suspicious death (refer to the Coroner's Matters guidelines). Seize any drugs, articles or other exhibits which might help your investigation.

You may still exercise your discretion for minor drug offences as indicated for non-fatal overdoses.

To ensure accountability, record your attendance on COPS. Select 'Associated factor' – 'Drug related' – and the further classification 'Fatal drug overdose'.

Contact your duty officer if you are in doubt about this guideline.

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