

Wisconsin Department of Health Services Expands Opioid Harm Reduction Measures

On September 9, 2025, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) [announced](#) widespread distribution of xylazine test strips and a renewed statewide naloxone standing order allowing participating pharmacies to dispense naloxone without a written prescription.

Xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer unsafe for human use, is often found mixed with fentanyl, heroin, cocaine or methamphetamine. It can result in fatal overdoses if accidentally used, and has been detected in 35 Wisconsin counties.

Xylazine test strips can be dipped into opioid residue mixed with water. Within a few minutes, users can identify whether the substance contains xylazine. It is important to note that test strips are more accurate for substances containing heroin or fentanyl, and a false positive may result for cocaine or meth-containing compounds. Testers should be cautioned that no test is fail-safe, and *xylazine may indeed be present in substances that show a false result.*

DHS is distributing 131,000 test strips at 78 agencies across the state. A [map](#) and [spreadsheet](#) listing these distribution sites is available on the DHS website. Currently, there is no limit to the number of test strips any individual may access. Step-by-step instructions for using the strips and interpreting the results are available in printable form [here](#).

In addition to harm reduction strategies such as test strips, Wisconsin has had a statewide standing order in effect since 2016 allowing [over 300 participating pharmacies](#) to dispense naloxone without a prescription to anyone who requests it. However, the existing standing order has been renewed, and allows pharmacies to dispense 3mg naloxone nasal spray in addition to the 4mg nasal spray and injectable naloxone products. Unlike the 2016 order, the renewed order will not expire.

While there is usually a charge for naloxone, most insurance plans do offer at least partial coverage if purchased from a pharmacist.

These new tools join an armamentarium of other strategies representing a comprehensive response to the opioid crisis already in place in Wisconsin, including fentanyl test strip distribution system, mobile response teams deployed to high overdose areas to distribute free resources to combat opioid use, as well as a [system](#) for health professionals to monitor for spikes in possible overdoses in their communities and take steps to minimize risk of harm.