

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Opioid overdose represents significant public health burden in both the Czechia and the world in general. Although the prevalence in opioid use in our country is relatively low, it carries a disproportionate risk of health damage, including death from overdose. An effective intervention in the event of an opioid overdose is the administration of naloxone – an opioid antagonist that displaces the opioid from its receptors and interrupts the depression of the respiratory center. So-called take-home naloxone programs are based on the distribution of naloxone to lay people to administer naloxone when they witness an overdose. Take-home naloxone program was approved by the Czech Council of Government for the Coordination of Drug Policy in 2020, and its implementation began in April 2021.

AIMS: The aim of this theses is to analyze the results of the take-home naloxone program in Czechia after two years of its operation.

METHODS: The research part of this theses is based on a combination of two components – quantitative and qualitative. The data come from the Naloxone project reports and the Naloxone distribution project reports, which are filled by representatives of the programs involved in the project and then sent to the National Monitoring Center for Drugs and Addiction. The quantitative part examines the number of programs involved, units of naloxone spray distributed, persons educated about the use of naloxone and the number of doses of naloxone used in the events of suspected overdose. The qualitative part is based on the analysis of the second, descriptive part of the Naloxone Distribution Project Reports from 2022, which is a section for comments and observations on the program from representatives of the services involved. A total of 45 reports were processed.

RESULTS: In the first two years of the take-home naloxone program in Czechia, at least 484 units of naloxone nasal spray were distributed in a total of 31 low-threshold programs. Of these, 262 pieces were issued in 2021 and 222 pieces in 2022. Most of them (49%) were distributed in Prague. The majority (over 90%) were distributed to opioid users. During the same period, at least 65 pieces of naloxone nasal spray were used in suspected overdoses, of which 54 pieces (over 80%) were used in Prague. According to the programs involved, the response from clients is generally very good. The late distribution of naloxone associated with the lack of sprays for the period of the so-called opium season is perceived by some services as the only significant problem.

CONCLUSION: Despite the relatively low number of high-risk opioid users and overdose deaths associated with them in our country, the naloxone distribution project among users and their relatives is proving to be a functional and effective harm reduction intervention in the Czech environment.

Key words: opioids – naloxone – take-home naloxone – overdose – antagonist