

Title: The Moral Hazard of Lifesaving Innovations: Naloxone Access, Opioid Abuse, and Crime

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Abstract:

States across the country have responded to the opioid epidemic by increasing access to Naloxone, a drug that can help save lives when administered during an overdose. However, Naloxone access may unintentionally increase opioid abuse because the catastrophic risk of death might have previously deterred risk-averse individuals from these substances. Using jurisdiction level panel data on crime and a difference-in-differences framework exploiting Naloxone access laws, we estimate that broadening Naloxone access increases opioid-related crimes by 50%. These effects come mostly from heroin and a category that includes prescription opioids. These crimes are also more likely to coincide with theft, assault, and robbery offenses, suggesting that drug users are engaging in other types of crime to fund their addiction or as a byproduct of addiction. We also show that Naloxone access may encourage substitution from crack and cocaine to opioids, and investigate changes in offender demographics and crime location. We find no statistically significant effect of expanded Naloxone access on placebo categories of crime including murder and marijuana-related offenses.