California struck up a new deal with Amneal Pharmaceuticals on April 29 to bolster the state's supply of the opioid overdose-reversing medication naloxone at a much lower price for schools, police
departments and others trying to ease the toll of fentanyl.

The deal would put the price tag for a two-dosage pack of FDA approved naloxone, often known by the brand name Narcan, at $24, a 40% drop from the current purchase price, state officials said at a news conference Monday.

That lower price will allow the state's health agencies to "stretch the opioid settlement-fund dollars much further," and purchase far more of the life-saving medicine than they otherwise would be able to afford, according to Elizabeth Landsberg, director of the California Department of Healthcare Access and Information.

States, including California have been awarded billions of dollars from settlements reached with several pharmacies and drug distributors who were sued for their role in fueling the opioid epidemic.

That discount on state-funded naloxone does not necessarily translate to lower prices at the drugstore for everyday shoppers, where naloxone usually costs around $45 per two-dose pack, according to experts. But it does mean that the state will be able to send more naloxone to the nonprofits, schools, police departments and other organizations who currently qualify for free doses from the state's plan.

Naloxone is a safe and easy-to-use nasal spray that can be administered to people of all ages who are suffering from an opioid overdose. In 2022, a record-breaking 7,385 Californians died from opioid overdoses. The vast majority of those deaths, 6,473, were fentanyl-related.

Governor Newsom touted the new deal with Amneal Pharmaceuticals, comparing it to the state's effort to offer insulin at a deep discount.

"California is disrupting the drug industry … securing life-saving drugs
at lower and transparent prices," Governor Newsom said. "As we continue the effort to bring $30 insulin to the market, the state is now set to purchase life-saving naloxone for almost half of the current market price—maximizing taxpayer dollars and saving more lives with this miracle drug."

In the Bay Area, fentanyl reached deeper into the cradle last year, killing three Bay Area infants and toddlers in one six-month period, including 3-month-old baby Phoenix Castro, of San Jose, who was sent home from the hospital with her drug-using father despite a social worker's warnings that she was unsafe.

The state's new partnership with Amneal Pharmaceuticals is not without controversy. The pharmacy group is a named defendant in dozens of lawsuits across the country alleging that they engaged in deceptive marketing practices to distribute opioids, in many cases after downplaying their addictiveness.

Last year Governor Gavin Newsom called on the state to manufacture its own naloxone, but there are still no solid plans for when, or how that would be achieved. State officials said the deal with Amneal Pharmaceuticals, which will last three years, will bridge the gap as they try to come up with their own manufacturing plan.

California's move to purchase Naloxone stands in marked contrast to the efforts in some states like Idaho, where lawmakers have sought to limit who can get access to the overdose-reversing medication.

Chelsea Shover, assistant professor of medicine at UCLA, said that the state's naloxone distribution efforts have been incredibly important in arming people at the front lines of the opioid crisis with a life-saving medication that they might not otherwise be able to afford.
"It enables naloxone to get into the hands of people who are most likely to be able to respond in the event of an overdose," Shover said.

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