Public Health Warning: Non-fatal Illicit Opioid Overdoses in Jackson County

Jackson County Public Health is issuing a Yellow Alert for accidental non-fatal overdoses from heroin. This alert is being issued based on a cluster of emergency department visits for non-fatal overdoses from heroin. The cluster occurred through June 19th to June 22nd, resulting in five hospital admissions. Law Enforcement and EMS have been responding to non-fatal overdoses from heroin during this time frame.

A yellow alert is a warning that Jackson County Public Health has identified that there are higher than usual or a cluster of suspected accidental illicit opioid overdoses, and are asking the medical community, other community partners, family and friends to be aware of the situation and advise people who suffer from an opioid addiction of the following information:

**BE PREPARED. GET NALOXONE. SAVE A LIFE.**

“The Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service, VADM Jerome Adams, has emphasized the importance of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone. For patients currently taking high doses of opioids as prescribed for pain, individuals misusing prescription opioids, individuals using illicit opioids such as heroin or fentanyl, health care practitioners, family and friends of people who have an opioid use disorder, and community members who come into contact with people at risk for opioid overdose, knowing how to use naloxone and keeping it within reach can save a life.”

- **Health Messaging to Patients to Prevent an Accidental Overdose**
  Serious drug overdoses are happening in our community. Abstaining from drug use is the best way to eliminate the risk of overdose. Even people who haven’t used in a while may relapse and are at increased risk of overdose.

  Prescribe and advise patients to carry naloxone and inform them that naloxone reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. It is legal to carry and administer naloxone in Oregon.

  If you use naloxone, the effects are temporary, and the person still needs medical attention. After the medication wears off, the person could fall back into a coma. If you call police or 911 to get help for someone having a drug overdose, **Oregon’s Good Samaritan Law protects you from being arrested or prosecuted** for drug-related charges or parole/probation violations based on information provided to emergency responders.
If your patient uses injection drugs, recommend that they utilize services from the Jackson County Syringe Exchange Program.

Ask the patient about their willingness to begin medication-assisted treatment or drug treatment. For a list of providers, you can access the Stay Safe Oregon website.

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<th>Overdose Risk Factors</th>
<th>Prevention Tips for Patient</th>
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<td>Mixing Drugs: Drugs taken together can interact in ways that increase their overall effect</td>
<td>Opioids, alcohol and benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium, etc.) all slow down breathing. Mixing these increases overdose risk.</td>
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<td>Tolerance: Tolerance develops over time, so the amount of drug a long-time users needs to feel the drug’s effect than a new user. If someone has relapsed, their tolerance will not be as high as it was previously.</td>
<td>Even if you have a high tolerance, you can still overdose. Tolerance levels drop rapidly during any break in drug use.</td>
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<td>Quality: The content and purity of street drugs are always unpredictable.</td>
<td>Do a tester shot and try to buy from the same dealer, so you have a better idea of what you are getting.</td>
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<td>Using Alone: While using alone isn’t necessarily a cause of an overdose, it can increase the chance of fatally overdosing because there is no one there to call for help or take care of you if you go out.</td>
<td>FIX WITH A FRIEND! Develop an overdose plan with your friends or partners, leave the door unlocked or slightly ajar, call someone you trust and have them check on you. Be sure someone has naloxone!</td>
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For more information on naloxone, pharmacies that are distributing naloxone, toolkits for pharmacies and information for prescribers, please visit the Oregon Health Authority website Naloxone Rescue for Opioid Overdose.

The mission of Jackson County Health and Human Services is to plan, coordinate and provide public services that protect and promote the health and well-being of county residents.

REFERENCES