

Iowa Department of Public Health
Division of Behavioral Health/Bureau of Substance Abuse
Opioid Update: August 2020

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) offers the Opioid Update to share information about opioid use and Iowa's efforts to address the national opioid epidemic. Please feel free to submit topics to Julie Jones at julie.jones@idph.iowa.gov.

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Iowa News

Iowa Pharmacies Offer Free NARCAN®

In an effort to further reduce the number of opioid-involved deaths in Iowa, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH), in partnership with the Iowa Board of Pharmacy, is sponsoring a new initiative that makes NARCAN® 4mg nasal spray (naloxone) available for free at local pharmacies. Any individual 18 years of age or older can request to be screened by a pharmacist for eligibility to receive NARCAN®. If approved, the pharmacy may dispense up to two NARCAN® 4mg nasal spray kits at no charge to the recipient.

“This allows Iowans to be prepared in the event they encounter someone experiencing a suspected opioid overdose, or perhaps use opioids themselves and want others they're involved with to know they have it,” said IDPH Opioid Initiatives Director, Kevin Gabbert. “While the dynamics of opioid misuse are complicated, greater availability of naloxone can help keep people alive, offer a chance to get help, and begin a journey of recovery.”

“This program completely eliminates financial barriers to access the antidote to opioid overdoses,” said Iowa Board of Pharmacy Executive Director Andrew Funk. “It's wonderful to see the confidence the department has in pharmacies and pharmacists across the state of Iowa by its willingness to partner with pharmacists, one of the most accessible healthcare providers. I'm excited to see the impact that this new endeavor will have on the health of Iowans.”

Past efforts to address opioid-involved deaths include issuing a statewide Naloxone Standing Order that made the medication available without a prescription, offering free naloxone kits to law enforcement agencies and emergency departments, and providing training to over 170 stakeholders statewide to be trainers on recognizing and responding to opioid overdose. While these and other efforts across Iowa have led to a reduction in the number of opioid involved deaths (from 206 deaths in 2017 to 137 deaths in 2018), provisional data for 2019 shows that the decrease did not continue and the state experienced an increase, with 157 deaths reported to date.

Anyone who may be in a position to assist in the event of an opioid overdose is encouraged to receive NARCAN® education and have a supply on hand. NARCAN® is safe and easy to use, but most importantly, it may save a life in the event of opioid overdose.

For more information and to order naloxone, please visit this website: [NALOXONE](#)

New Indicator in NarxCare Report

On May 20, 2020, the Iowa Prescription Drug Monitoring Program introduced a new indicator within a patient's PDMP report that will alert the clinician if the patient was administered Naloxone by EMS and first responders. When a patient experiences a Naloxone administration event, an indicator within the patient's PDMP NarxCare report will be displayed. This indicator, in addition to the patient's prescription drug history, is intended to enable authorized users of the PDMP to better support patient needs.

The Iowa PDMP continues to deliver NarxCare, which aggregates and analyzes prescription information from providers and pharmacies and presents interactive, visual representations of that information, as well as advanced analytic insights and risk scores to help physicians, pharmacists, and care teams provide better patient safety and outcomes.

NarxCare is available from within the Iowa PDMP web portal, which is located at: [NarxCare](#)

It can also be accessed from within the Electronic Health Record via the PDMP Gateway, which is located at: [GATEWAY](#)

Opioid News

Coronavirus Pandemic Compounds Another Ongoing Crisis: The Opioid Epidemic

This NPR interview with the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Dr. Volkow discusses how coronavirus pandemic measures are compounding one of the worst epidemics in the United States: the opioid epidemic. Dr. Volkow describes the factors that are most likely contributing to an estimated 30% to 40% increase in opioid overdoses but also emphasizes that treatment works and remains available via telehealth.

To read the entire article and listen to the interview, please click on the following link: [WBUR](#)

Fatal overdoses climbed to record high in 2019, reversing historic progress

According to preliminary Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, there were 70,980 reported overdose deaths in 2019, which surpassed the peak of 70,699 overdose deaths in 2017. As Bod Anderson, chief of mortality statistics at the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics states, "it seems that 2019 is the new high for drug overdose deaths. Data are still provisional at this point, but the increase in the last few months of 2019 was steep enough to push it over the top by a little more than two hundred deaths."

This article discusses the national data as well as the removal of barriers to telehealth that have occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kevin Gabbert, the Opioid Initiatives Director for the Iowa Department of Public Health shares that, "it's unfortunate that an event such as the pandemic had to create that opportunity, but nonetheless it has allowed our providers to reach a large number of individuals they might not otherwise be able to" through the delivery of telehealth services.

To read this article, please click on the following link: [CDC](#)

To learn more about the preliminary data, please click on the following link: [NCHS](#)

Webinars and Trainings

Why Opioid Misuse Messaging is an Essential Part of Your COVID-19 Response

Recent research reflects that COVID-19 has led to increases in opioid misuse and opioid-related overdoses. As your community responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to include evidence-based opioid misuse messaging in your planning. While this can be difficult with tightening budgets, leveraging best practices can help your team address this need quickly and efficiently. Learn how to overcome these challenges and develop your messaging strategy. This webinar will review research and insights showing the impact of COVID-19 on substance misuse, best practices for engaging high-risk audiences with evidence-based content, and messaging that can be used in your practice.

To register for this webinar, please click on the following link: [WEBINAR](#)

Join the Hepatitis C ECHO Learning Community

Through didactic sessions and case presentations, the Hepatitis C ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is an interactive web-based program that provides community-focused primary care clinicians and clinical staff who provide treatment and care to individuals with HCV an opportunity to become experts in the delivery of Hepatitis C care through a mentoring-based initiative. These sessions are 90 minutes long and occur every third Tuesday of the month.

To register, email ECHO@iowapca.org