



NEWS

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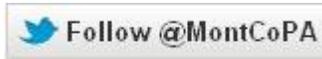
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Montco Takes Pro-Active Steps in Battle against Heroin and Other Opioid Use

Norristown, PA (October 15, 2015) – Montgomery County continues to take aggressive steps in its battle to reduce the number of heroin and opioid-related overdoses in the county.

At the bi-weekly meeting of the Montgomery County Commissioners Thursday, Commissioner Val Arkoosh, who is also the interim medical director of the county health department, announced that she has issued a countywide standing order for naloxone, also known as narcan. The standing order allows any licensed pharmacy in the county, which chooses to participate, to dispense naloxone to individuals at risk of a heroin or opioid-related overdose, or to close friends or family of someone at risk.

Naloxone blocks or reverses the effects of opioid medication, including extreme drowsiness, slowed breathing, or loss of consciousness. Naloxone is used to treat a narcotic overdose in an emergency situation.

“We are serious about attacking this problem from all sides in Montgomery County,” Arkoosh said in making the announcement. “Heroin and opioid-related use, overdoses, and fatalities are on the rise nationally, as well as here in Montgomery County. By issuing this standing order for naloxone we are empowering individuals throughout the county to have access to a life-saving antidote. Act 139 has given us additional tools to do just that.”

Act 139 allows first responders, including law enforcement, firefighters, EMS and other organizations, the ability to administer naloxone, and allows individuals such as friends or family members that may be in a position to assist a person at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose to obtain a

naloxone prescription. Act 139 provides immunity from prosecution for those responding to and reporting overdoses.

Arkoosh said that while naloxone can save the lives of those who have overdosed, “the ultimate goal is to ensure that those who are struggling with addiction receive the education, treatment, and recovery supports they need to live a healthy and productive life.”

To that end, the Montgomery County Overdose Task Force (MCOTF), created by the commissioners last September, released its latest report at the commissioners meeting on the progress it has made since March when it released its initial recommendations for action. This comes on the heels of an announcement by the District Attorney’s office on Tuesday that it will use \$160,000 of drug forfeiture money to ensure that every police and first responder vehicle will have naloxone on board.

According to the Montgomery County Coroner’s office, there were a total of 64 heroin-related deaths in Montgomery County in 2014 – a 39% increase from 2013. In the first quarter of 2015 alone, there were 31 opiate-related deaths in the county, 20 of which included heroin. However, in April several police departments in the county began equipping their police cars with naloxone provided by the county, and since then there have been 16 “saves,” or overdoses reversed because police arrived on the scene with naloxone.

Highlights of the MCOTF report included:

- MCOTF coordinated unprecedented partnerships among Public Safety, Law Enforcement, Treatment Specialists, Education, and Public Health officials to combat this issue.
- Montgomery County Office of Drug and Alcohol currently provides Evidence Based Programs, Intervention Services, and Student Assistant Programs in 18 of the 21 school districts (plus two private high schools and one private elementary school) in Montgomery County. This represents an increase of six new school districts participating in 2015.
- Montgomery County Office of Behavioral Health has combined Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health Services to provide additional support to students and staff in our county school districts. This includes Mental Health group sessions, transition support following treatment or placement, in school screening and assessments. In addition, we have adopted a standard assessment tool developed by Drexel University and Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia that allows a quicker response with conclusive data.
- The Montgomery County Billboard Contest, “Spread the Word,” is underway. Students representing 10 school districts are participating, and will develop a billboard message related

to the tragedy of overdose, or choose to create a message that promotes healthy choices regarding substance use.

- Montgomery County Office of Drug and Alcohol held the *Second Annual Other Faces of Addiction* on Wednesday, October 7th at Montgomery County Community College, Blue Bell and West Campus. This event is for parents, friends, and family members who have a loved one suffering with the disease of addiction.
- Office of Drug and Alcohol and the Office of Behavioral Health continue to meet and update county staff regarding treatment as well as the most current resources available for citizens.

Abington Police Chief William Kelly presented the MCOTF report. “It is our recommendation to continue to meet, research, and evaluate the issue while working with county departments on new initiatives to reduce overdose deaths in our community,” Kelly said. “Moving forward, we would like to focus our efforts on the treatment categories of our initial report while maintaining a vigilant effort on intervention and prevention initiatives. We will continue to expand the roll, reach, and composition of the task force in order to bring new perspectives to combating this crisis.”

Arkoosh’s standing order will apply to intranasal and automatic injection administration, and will allow pharmacies operating under that order to dispense take-home naloxone rescue kits. “These types of administration of naloxone are easy to administer and safe, which is why they are covered by this standing order,” Arkoosh said. “This is an evidence-based harm reduction strategy that will save lives.”

For those pharmacies that choose to dispense naloxone under the standing order, an informational pamphlet will be provided for distribution to the recipient of the rescue kit. The pamphlet, which can also be found on the health department’s website, also refers patients and caregivers to additional online resources, including videos, at www.prescribeprevent.org. Caregivers should take advantage of the available online training. The registered pharmacist is also required to provide instructions to the recipient of the rescue kit including:

- Call 9-1-1 for EMS to be dispatched immediately.
- In cardiac arrest or pulseless patients, start cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Any attempt to administer naloxone should not interrupt chest compressions and rescue breathing.
- Naloxone should only be given to someone suspected of opioid overdose.
- In respiratory arrest or a non-breathing patient, start rescue breathing. Rescue breathing takes priority over naloxone administration. Administer naloxone if possible while doing rescue breathing.

- Individuals should become familiar with assembly and administration of naloxone prior to the need to use it.

It is vitally important that a person who receives naloxone receive medical treatment following administration. The duration or effect of naloxone is 30 to 90 minutes, and patients should be observed after this time frame for the return of overdose symptoms. More than one dose of naloxone may be needed to revive someone who is overdosing. Most rescue kits contain two doses in the event such a step is necessary. When given to individuals who are not experiencing an opioid-related overdose, naloxone provides no negative effects, even at high doses. Recipients should also make certain to be aware of the expiration date on the naloxone. To make sure that the antidote lasts as long as possible naloxone should be kept in a dark and dry place between 25° C/80° F and 5° C/40° F.

Pharmacies that utilize Arkoosh's standing order will be listed on the Health Department's website, and the information will also be shared with the state. Members of the public are encouraged to inquire at their local pharmacy for information about locations where naloxone is available and how to get it.

Dr. Arkoosh's standing order will be made available upon request to interested pharmacists. Participating pharmacists are required to have the order signed by the pharmacy manager, must keep a signed copy of the order on the pharmacy premises, and must return a signed copy to the Health Department for tracking purposes. Pharmacies may contact Rhonda Stanek, the Health Department's Public Health Nurse Supervisor at 610-970-5040 or via e-mail at rstanek@montcopa.org with questions, for more information, or to receive the standing order.

Publicly funded substance abuse management services and supports are provided through the Montgomery County Office of Behavioral Health. Those seeking non-emergency drug and alcohol services may call the Office of Behavioral Health, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 610-278-3642. Individuals experiencing a substance use related emergency should immediately call 9-1-1 for assistance.