



Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Statewide News Release

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Public Health Reports 15 Total Overdoses, 12 Deaths Over Holiday Weekend

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 7, 2016) — The Kentucky Department for Public Health continues to warn Kentuckians about the risks associated with heroin and other drugs.

DPH scheduled an emergency call last week to prepare hospitals, health departments and emergency medical personnel after receiving reports of increased overdoses linked to heroin mixed with fentanyl and other dangerous substances. At that time, public health officials requested hospitals and providers report all overdoses, including non-fatal overdoses, to DPH in order for the department to better understand the breadth of the problem.

Of that preliminary reporting, 15 overdoses, 12 of which were fatal, were reported to DPH.

“We would like to commend our partners in Kentucky’s hospitals, healthcare facilities, coroners, local health departments and emergency medical services for helping us prepare for and respond to this public health crisis,” said DPH Commissioner Dr. Hiram Polk. “Individuals and agencies from around the state demonstrated not only their concern for this issue, but a willingness to act and assist us in getting a handle on this growing problem.”

In addition to outreach to stakeholders and a statewide public health alert warning about the dangers of tainted drugs, DPH activated the State Health Operations Center to respond to community needs regarding drug activity and overdose and collect voluntary reporting from hospitals.

“DPH is working with our partners to develop better, more accurate ways to collect data on non-fatal overdoses in the state in real time,” said Dr. Connie White, deputy senior commissioner for clinical affairs in DPH. “Of concern is the fact that around 80 percent of the overdoses voluntarily reported to us this weekend ended in death. We need to use this information to educate the public: If you are using or have a friend or family member who uses, have naloxone available for resuscitation. Seconds matter.”

Naloxone is available by prescription at many pharmacies around the state. Many emergency medical services also stock the medication as well emergency rooms. In addition, Good Samaritan provisions in Kentucky law prohibit prosecution of drug users who seek medical assistance for others who overdose.

“If you are using drugs with someone who overdoses, you should immediately seek medical care for that individual without being prosecuted,” said Dr. White. “We want people to understand there are services available that could save someone’s life if they overdose.”

DPH continues to encourage providers to report all overdose activity. Reports can be made to the Kentucky Poison Control hotline at 1-800-222-1222. Reports will help support public health’s efforts as well as national surveillance.

DPH also has several hotlines and resources in place to assist local providers. Assistance is available by calling the Department for Public Health at 1-888-9REPORT (973-7678) or Kentucky Emergency Management System at (502) 607-1638 or toll free (800) 255-2587.

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected or is at risk of harm related to substance abuse, call 911 or 1-877-KYSAFE1 to report.

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.