Overdose Prevention Campaign

Naloxone Distribution

What is Naloxone?
Naloxone is a prescription medication that blocks the effects of opioid drugs such as heroin, oxycodone and methadone. It rapidly reverses the respiratory depression that results from an opioid overdose. It is standard practice for emergency personnel to administer naloxone when summoned to the scene of an overdose. Naloxone has no psychoactive or addictive qualities and few side effects. After a simple training, naloxone can be safely administered by laypeople, including family members and peers, either by injection or with a nasal spray.

Public Health Organizations Are Implementing Overdose Prevention Programs Which Provide Access to Naloxone
Because naloxone is only available by prescription, it has not been widely accessible to those in a position to immediately help in an overdose situation, such as peers and family members. However, in response to the national overdose problem, a growing number of public health organizations around the country are implementing overdose prevention programs that provide those at risk of overdose, their families and peers with training and take-home doses of naloxone. These programs have resulted in the reversal of thousands of opioid overdoses that otherwise might have been fatal, and increased overdose education and awareness. Massachusetts recently celebrated the 1000th overdose reversal in a pilot naloxone distribution program instituted in 2007. In Cook County, Illinois, a naloxone distribution program helped to reduce the number of overdose deaths from 466 in 2000 to 324 in 2003.

States Are Acting to Support Overdose Prevention Programs and Expand Access to Naloxone
The most effective way to expand access to naloxone and encourage the implementation of overdose prevention programs is by providing legal protections to medical professionals and laypeople who prescribe or administer naloxone in overdose situations. Ten states, Virginia, North Carolina, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island and Washington State, as well as the District of Columbia, have passed laws that provide legal protection from civil or criminal liability for people who prescribe or administer naloxone to those at risk for drug overdose. “From a public health perspective, it’s a no-brainer,” says Dan O’Connell, Director of the HIV Prevention Division in the New York State Health Department. “For someone who is experiencing an overdose, naloxone can be the difference between life and death.”

New Jersey Must Have a Comprehensive Response to Prevent Overdose Deaths
Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in New Jersey and three quarters of overdose deaths involve opioid drugs. New Jersey must have a comprehensive response to prevent drug overdose deaths. A key element in that response is expanded access to naloxone. Expanding access to naloxone will save lives and prevent untold suffering.