

Some Ala. first responders to get opioid overdose drug

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(Photo: Mel Evans/ The Associated Press)

To address the opioid epidemic within the state of Alabama and to help prevent opioid overdose deaths, first responders throughout the state will have access to 600 kits of the lifesaving antidote naloxone.

This distribution of naloxone – an easy-to-use antidote for an overdose from heroin or other opioid drugs – will be made possible through a collaborative effort with Kaléo Pharma, the Alabama District Attorneys Association, the Office of Prosecution Services, a partnership between Air University and Harvard University, and the state department of public health.

Related news: [Ivey creates council to tackle opioid addiction \(/story/news/local/alabama/2017/08/16/ivey-creates-council-tackle-opioid-addiction/571903001/\)](#)

Of the state's 4.85 million people, the 5,840,754 pain pills prescribed in the state in 2015 averages to 1.2 prescriptions per person, as reported from a joint investigation into opioids by The Associated Press and the Center for Public Integrity.

A total of 736 people in Alabama died in 2015 from drug overdoses, including overdoses of opioids, such as heroin, fentanyl and prescription narcotics, as well as other drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The governor's office reported that of Alabama's 736 reported drug overdose deaths in 2015, a total of 282 – 38 percent – were caused by opioids, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation review of CDC data.

Read more: [Education, treatment critical as opioid crisis grows \(/story/news/2017/08/22/education-treatment-critical-opioid-crisis-grows/573833001/\)](#)

Now, when law enforcement personnel arrive on a scene and suspect a person has overdosed, the officer can administer the injection which will cause the temporary reversal of an opioid overdose, allowing enough time for emergency medical personnel to arrive.

"We are fortunate that through a special allocation in a grant these lifesaving medications are made available at no cost to the state," said acting State Health Officer Scott Harris.

The two-dose kits were provided through a grant through Kaléo Pharma. The kits are intended for first responder organizations to use in the field and were provided by the EVZIO Naloxone HCl Injection product donation program.

More: [Opioids in Alabama \(/story/news/2016/09/18/opioids-alabama/90317458/\)](#)

"We are taking a step in the right direction to address the opioid epidemic in Alabama," Harris said. "It has become a tremendous health problem for us. Increased availability of naloxone for first responders will address the opioid problem in the state."

Gov. Kay Ivey last month announced that she has signed Executive Order 708, creating the Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council. This executive order changes the previous Alabama Council on Opioid Misuse and Addiction, and adds an Alabama attorney general as a third co-chair, and a physician appointed by the Medical Association of the State of Alabama.

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"I am so proud that Alabama has very progressive laws allowing first responders to provide lifesaving aid to those in need," said Brian Hastings, Alabama Emergency Management Agency director.

"This unique partnership and program builds lifesaving capability in our Alabama law enforcement enterprise to make our state safe for all and to save lives. There is nothing worse than watching someone die, especially when we know we have the capability to prevent it."

Every first responder who receives a kit will undergo mandated training to administer the antidote, said Barry Matson, executive director of the Alabama District Attorneys Association and the Office of Prosecution Services.

Alabama's district attorneys voted to accept the kits for local distribution, he added. Naloxone will not only protect first responders, it can be used for any life at risk.

The program not only provides the antidote to overdose, but also essential training for first responders. The distribution will begin next week.

What are opioids?

Opioids are substances that act on opioid receptors to produce morphine-like effects. Opioids are most often used medically to relieve pain.

Nationwide

In the U.S., there were 227,780,915 opioid prescriptions issued in 2015.

Top 5 states in 2015:

Alabama: 5,840,754 prescriptions; 1.20 per person

Tennessee: 7,800,947; 1.18 per person

West Virginia: 2,076,883; 1.13 per person

Arkansas: 3,312,715; 1.11 per person

Mississippi: 3,212,366; 1.07 per person

Source: The Associated Press and the Center for Public Integrity

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