

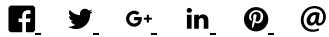


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EDITOR'S PICK

## OPIOID OVERDOSES: First responders to begin carrying antidote

Staff reports Sep 8, 2017



As the epidemic of opioid abuse continues to rise Alabama and nationally, first-responders are now being equipped with tools to offset — and possibly prevent — overdose deaths.

An announcement will be made today about a program to provide 600 kits containing naloxone to first-responders statewide. The effort is part of a collaboration between the Kaléo Pharma, Alabama District Attorneys Association, Office of Prosecution Services, Alabama Emergency Management Agency and the Alabama Department of Public Health.

The two-dose kits were provided at no cost to the state via a grant through Kaléo Pharma.

The Limestone County District Attorney's Office will receive two kits initially, but District Attorney Brian Jones said he plans to inquire about the possibility of receiving more. Not only can naloxone be used to treat overdosing patients, Jones pointed out it may also be used on first-responders who come in contact with dangerous opioids.

"Law enforcement and other first responders already face risks inherent with their profession. However, with the potential deadly consequences of accidental fentanyl exposure, they may never see it coming," he said. "An inadvertent inhalation or accidental contact with their skin could have life-threatening consequences. I am proud our association has partnered in this way to save lives."

### A growing problem

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 91 Americans die of an opioid overdose each day. Alabama is one of 13 states prescribing 96 to 143 opioid medications per 100 people.

Opioid drugs bind to receptors in the brain in a way that reduces pain and produces euphoric feelings. These receptors also control respiration. When the levels of opioids in the brain get too high, breathing slows down, eventually causing respiratory failure and a lack of oxygen to the brain and central nervous system.

Naloxone, also known as Narcan in a nasal spray form, displaces the opioids in the brain and blocks them from binding to the brain's receptors so the body can return to normal breathing.

### 'Easy to use'

According to a release about the program, naloxone is an "easy-to-use antidote" for a heroin or opioid overdose. When law enforcement personnel arrive on a scene and suspect a person has overdosed, the officer can administer the injection, allowing enough time for emergency medical personnel to arrive.

Barry Matson, executive director of the Alabama District Attorneys Association and the Office of Prosecution Services, said each first-responder who receives a kit will receive the necessary training to administer the drug. Distribution of the kits will begin next week.

"We are taking a step in the right direction to address the opioid epidemic in Alabama," said Dr. Scott Harris, acting state health officer. "Increased availability of naloxone for first responders will address the opioid problem in the state."

### Decatur efforts

On Thursday, the city of Decatur announced its police department would also begin carrying nasal spray doses of Narcan. It will be supplied to all supervising officers.

"Police officers are often the first emergency personnel to arrive to an overdose situation," said Officer James Spence. "Narcan lets us help a person in the critical minutes of an overdose until medical technicians arrive."

State House Bill 208 gave law enforcement officers the authority to use Narcan to treat opioid overdoses. Officers are required to complete mandatory training before administering the drug.

Decatur is one of the first police departments in the state to implement the training and certified usage of Narcan.

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