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FEATURED

First responders getting tool for opioid overdoses

By Tom Smith Senior Staff Writer May 17, 2018



Jamie Gray and Jamey Durham, with the Alabama Department of Health, present a program to emergency responders to train in the use of Narcan Kits during a meeting at Northwest Shoals College in Muscle Shoals on Wednesday. The revival kits are for use with people who have overdosed on certain drugs and have been made available to various agencies in the state in the aid of Senators Tim Melson and Gerald Dial (left, speaking). (JIM HANNON/TIMESDAILY)

TUSCUMBIA — Jimmy Looney said there is nothing more helpless than being on the scene of an overdose and not being able to do anything but wait for an ambulance to arrive.

“You know they have overdosed; you see all the signs, and there is nothing you can do but wait,” said Looney, commander of the East Colbert Rescue Squad.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, more than 100 people die every day from opioid

overdoses.



The same study showed that in 2015, there were 282 opioid overdose deaths in Alabama, and that number grew to 343 deaths in 2016.

“We see more and more of it,” Looney said of the drug problem.

State Sen. Gerald Dial, R-Lineville, and the Alabama Department of Public Health, the state Emergency Management Agency and the state Board of Pharmacy have launched a statewide program to give first responders a tool to be used to help save the lives of anyone who has overdosed on opioids.

“We have kits that these emergency personnel will have that can save someone’s life,” said Dial, who is the former chairman of the Senate Health Committee.

The kits contain two auto-injectors of EVZIO (Naloxone injection), which was approved for use in opioid overdoses in 1971. Health officials said EVZIO can reverse the effects of an overdose and restore breathing.



Wednesday morning, Dial and representatives from the state Department of Public Health were at Northwest-Shoals Community College to meet with area first responders, and train them on the use of the EVZIO kits.

Dial said he got involved with the program when he heard about Kaleo Pharmaceuticals giving the state of Virginia kits.

“We all know the crisis we have in our nation and our state with opioid addiction and overdose, so I called the company,” Dial said. “Kaleo is supplying 25,000 kits to be distributed across the state.

“We started meeting with first responders and handing out kits on May 2, and we plan on finishing May 23.”

Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, morphine and others available legally by prescription.



When misused, opioid pain relievers can lead to overdose incidents and deaths.

The EVZIO kits, contain three auto-injectors — one for training and two “live ones.”

“There are two that are complete,” said Jamie Gray of the Alabama Department of Public Health’s Emergency Medical Services office. “They are used just like an epi-pen.”

After watching a short video on the kits, Gray then demonstrated on himself the ease of using the auto-injector.

“You place it on the outer thigh of the patient, push it down, you hear a click, and then hold for five seconds,” he said.

He said if a patient doesn't respond within 2 to 3 minutes, the first responders should use the second auto-injector.

Gray said the auto-injector is "just for opioid overdose" but if the overdose is not from opioid "it will not hurt the patient."

Jamey Durham, with the state Department of Public Health, said the kits have already saved a life.

"We gave out kits two weeks ago and one was used Tuesday night and it worked, it saved the person's life," Durham said. "That's what this is all about."

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