



Jackson County Department of Public Health

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In March, The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services announced through a press release that an average of nine North Carolinians died each day from a drug overdose in 2020, a 40% increase from the previous year. Also within 2020, the nation exceeded 100,000 overdose deaths for the first time. North Carolina's overdose deaths increased by nearly 1,000 deaths. Provisional data from 2021 and 2022 shows the increase has continued.

According to Injury Free NC, a wide variety of demographics and both urban and rural communities are experiencing an increase in overdose deaths, though the most commonly affected people are white or American Indian, male, and 25 to 48 years old. Further, males continue to die from unintentional injuries (which includes opioid overdoses and unintentional poisonings) more often than females, though the large gap between the two has started to close. Per NCDHHS, from 2019 to 2020, the rates of overdose deaths of the American Indian/Indigenous population increased by 93%, Black/African American overdose death rates increased 66% and White overdose death rates increased by 32% in our state.

To reverse these tragic trends, NCDHHS continues to implement the North Carolina Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan which "aims to prevent addiction, reduce harm from substance use and connect [people to substance use services, housing and employment support, and to do all of this with attention to equity.

If you or a loved one uses opioids legally or illegally, having quick access to naloxone (also known as Narcan) is paramount for saving lives. Naloxone works by reversing an overdose from opioids such as heroin, fentanyl, and prescription opioid medications when given in time. Naloxone blocks the effects of opioids and can restore normal breathing within 2 to 3 minutes in a person whose breath has slowed, or even stopped, from an opioid overdose. More than one dose of naloxone may be required when stronger opioids like fentanyl are involved. If you give someone naloxone, stay with them until emergency help has been called and arrived.

Recognizing the signs of an overdose can save a life. Look for small, constricted "pinpoint pupils," falling asleep or losing consciousness, slow, weak or no breathing, choking or gurgling sounds, a limp body, cold and/or clammy skin, and discolored skin (especially in lips and nails). If you think someone is overdosing, and even if you aren't sure, treat it like it is an overdose as that could save lives. Call 911 immediately, administer naloxone, try to keep the person awake and breathing, lay the person on their side to prevent choking, and stay with the person until emergency assistance arrives.



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Naloxone is available in all 50 states. If you have been prescribed high-dose opioids, talk to your doctor about co-prescribing naloxone. In North Carolina, you can often get naloxone at your local pharmacy without a prescription. Jackson County is working on making affordable naloxone more available in the community.

The Jackson County Department of Public Health has been supporting opioid prevention initiatives in the county since at least 2015 when substance use prevention became a community priority through the Community Health Assessment. Efforts have included prescriber education, Naloxone and Narcan education such as what it is, how to obtain, and how to use, partnering with local EMS and law enforcement agencies to host medication take back events, promote local medication drop boxes, provide education on overdose awareness and medication safety to the community, write grants to receive money for the community and more.

People can and do recover from using substances. Many community members, local agencies and the local government are working hard in Jackson County to promote positive change and turn the curve on the opioid epidemic. Funding through the Opioid Settlement will be helpful in making larger scale changes. We are hopeful for a future where are residents can be drug-free.

To get involved with efforts, contact Janelle Messer, health education supervisor, at janellemesser@jacksonnc.org or (828) 587-8238.

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