

2/5/2021

** NOTICE: This health alert provides written guidance for health care professionals and others who may need to take action to prevent or control a notifiable condition. It is not intended to provide guidance for the general public.*

Increase of Overdose Deaths in Washington State

Actions Requested:

- *Educate patients about changes in the drug supply and the risks for overdose due to fentanyl.*
- *Ensure patients and their caregivers have access to and knowledge about naloxone.*
 - *Prescribe naloxone to anyone who uses illicit drugs.*
 - *Prescribe or distribute naloxone to people who use opioids and have recently been incarcerated or have had a break in use.*
 - *Co-prescribe naloxone with an opioid prescription.*
 - *Provide resources for patients, their friends, and their family about how to use naloxone.*
 - *Counsel patients about how to create a safety plan with their friends, family, and caregivers in case of an overdose.*
 - *Inform patients and caregivers on Washington's standing order <https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/DrugUserHealth/OverdoseandNaloxone> to dispense naloxone.*
 - *Talk to patients who are in recovery from opioid use disorder (OUD) about the risk for recurrence of use and the benefits of effective treatment medications and naloxone.*

Background:

Preliminary data from the Washington State Department of Health indicate there were more overdose deaths in Washington in 2020 than in 2019. The number of overdose deaths due to fentanyl is particularly concerning. Preliminary data show¹:

- *828 overdose deaths in Washington in the first half of 2020, compared to 607 overdose deaths in first half of 2019.*
- *Of those overdose deaths, 305 were attributed to fentanyl in the first half of 2020, while 137 were attributed to fentanyl in the first half of 2019.*

A convergence of factors may be leading to an increased risk of drug overdose in Washington. Illicit fentanyl has been found in counterfeit pills made to look like prescription opioids, as well as in powders and other illicit drugs. The extended disillusionment phase² of disaster for the COVID-19 pandemic may be an additional factor since it is typically the disaster phase with the greatest behavioral health impacts.

¹ Washington State Department of Health. (2020). Death certificates [Data file]. Retrieved on January 25, 2021.

² For a description of each phase in the disaster timeline, refer to page 5 of the COVID-19 Behavioral Health Group Impact Reference Guide (<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/BHG-COVID19BehavioralHealthGroupImpactReferenceGuide.pdf>).



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Resources:

For Providers:

Washington State Department of Health: Overdose Education & Naloxone Distribution
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/DrugUserHealth/OverdoseandNaloxone>

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute, University of Washington: Know the difference between heroin and fentanyl: https://adai.washington.edu/WAdata/heroin_versus_fentanyl.htm

Learn About Treatment training videos for providers: <https://www.learnabouttreatment.org/professionals/training-videos/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): Treatment Improvement Protocol 63: Medications for Opioid Use Disorder:
<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TIP-63-Medications-for-Opioid-Use-Disorder-Full-Document/PEP20-02-01-006>

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department -Syringe Services Program:
<https://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/personalhealth/clinics/SyringeExchange.html>

Thurston County Opioid Response Task Force:
<https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/phss/Pages/opioid-response.aspx>

Public Health – Seattle & King County: Overdose prevention and response:
<https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/overdose-prevention.aspx>

For Caregivers and Communities:

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute, University of Washington: <https://stopoverdose.org/>

Resources for individual and communities in Washington, including information on fentanyl, for responding to and preventing opioid overdoses:
<https://stopoverdose.org/section/fentanyl/>

Learn About Treatment for you, your family member or friend, or your Community: <https://www.learnabouttreatment.org/>

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department -Syringe Services Program:
<https://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/personalhealth/clinics/SyringeExchange.html>

THANK YOU FOR REPORTING

TO REPORT A NOTIFIABLE CONDITION IN THURSTON COUNTY	
Voice mail for reporting non-immediately reportable conditions (24 hours a day)	Phone: 360-786-5470 Fax: 360-867-2601
Day time immediately reportable conditions – Call detailed information to the 24-hour Notifiable Condition Reporting Line at 360-786-5470. Messages are picked up hourly. If a call back can't wait call 360-867-2500 and ask staff to locate a Communicable Disease staff.	Phone: 360-786-5470
After hours immediately and 24-hour reportable conditions or a public health emergency	Call 1-800-986-9050
No one is available with Thurston County Public Health and condition is immediately notifiable	1-877-539-4344

Communicable Disease Updates are posted online at: <http://bit.ly/CDUpdatePHSS>