



KALAMAZOO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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NEWS RELEASE
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Kalamazoo County Drug and Opioid Epidemic Brief & Report Released

KALAMAZOO, MI— In an updated and more comprehensive report, the Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department describes opioid prescribing rates, emergency department visits for opioid overdoses and a three year (2015-2017) analysis of drug and opioid overdoses deaths from the Kalamazoo County Medical Examiner.

Fentanyl-related deaths increased from six (three Kalamazoo County residents) in 2015 to 35 (26 Kalamazoo County residents) in 2017. Fentanyl is a powerful opioid that can be either prescribed by a healthcare professional or produced illegally. Illegal fentanyl, also known as illicitly manufactured fentanyl, is now driving the opioid overdose epidemic and poses a serious public health threat to Kalamazoo County.

The report also includes the following key points:

- As of 2017, 63.3 opioid prescriptions per 100 persons were dispensed in Kalamazoo County, exceeding the national average of 58.7.
- The amount and strength of opioids prescribed decreased by 22.6% from 2015 to 2017
- Although opioid overdose visits make up a very small percentage of all Kalamazoo County emergency department visits, opioid overdose visits have increased and peaking at 350 visits in 2016, averaging nearly one opioid overdose visit per day.
- Emergency department visits for heroin overdose tripled among men from 48 visits in 2015 to 148 visits in 2017, while heroin overdose visits among women more than doubled with 18 visits in 2015 and 52 visits in 2017.
- Following a sharp increase in deaths in 2016, Kalamazoo County's 2017 crude total opioid-related death rate of 16.7 deaths per 100,000 residents was lower than Michigan's 2017 crude rate of 19.1 deaths per 100,000 residents.
- Drug-related deaths involving methamphetamine (a stimulant drug) among Kalamazoo County residents increased from 3 in 2015 to 16 deaths in 2017. Although in the midst of an opioid overdose epidemic, this significant change highlights the need to prevent all types of drug-related deaths.

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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The full report can be found on the Kalamazoo County Data Hub website at www.kalcounty.com/hcs/datahub/.

“Prioritizing treatment for opioid addiction is essential to reversing the tide of opioid-related deaths,” states Dr. William Nettleton, Medical Director, Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services Department. Dr. Nettleton adds, “Addiction is not a moral defect. It is a long-term, relapsing and all-too-often deadly disease of the brain that affects not only the lives of addicted individuals—but their families and relationships as well.”

An opioid is an addictive drug that eases pain and also causes feelings of extreme pleasure. Opioids include prescription medications like oxycodone and illegal drugs like heroin. When taken alone or especially with other drugs, including prescription medications, opioids can stop a person’s breathing and result in a deadly overdose. Signs of opioid overdose include extreme sleepiness, slow or absent breathing, very small eye pupils and the skin color turning blue. If you suspect an overdose, call 911 immediately. Michigan law protects individuals who possess illegal controlled substances in amounts for personal use from criminal drug charges if they are seeking medical attention for themselves or someone else in the event of a drug overdose (HB 5649).

Naloxone is a drug that can reverse the effects of an opioid and can prevent a deadly overdose. Learn to perform rescue breathing techniques from your healthcare provider or naloxone trainer to aid a person overdosing. Always call 911 when aiding an overdose victim. Naloxone is covered by Medicaid and many other insurances and is available without a prescription at the following pharmacies listed on the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services website. https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_79584_79585_79587_79591---,00.html

Naloxone kits are available through the Southwest Michigan Chapter of Families Against Narcotics (FAN). FAN can be reached at 269-580-8290.

Medicaid patients may access substance use services in Kalamazoo County by calling Southwest Michigan Behavioral Health’s access line at 800-781-0353.

The Kalamazoo County Opioid Coalition convenes community partners and takes a public health approach to address the opioid epidemic in Kalamazoo County.

For more information on opioids and resources for patients, families, prescribers, pharmacists and communities visit: https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_79584---,00.html

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