

Facts About Heroin: A national epidemic and a local problem

The Community Committee of the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition serves as a think tank to examine community needs, implement alcohol and substance abuse awareness campaigns, educate the public regarding ongoing and emerging alcohol and substance abuse trends and pursue viable funding streams to address gaps in community services.

According to a survey of 1,408 Glen Cove residents conducted by the Coalition in 2016, 12.3 percent indicated heroin was a concern, compared to 2014 data where heroin was not a known problem in the community.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), heroin is an opioid drug made from morphine, a natural substance taken from the seeds of various opium poppy plants grown in Southeast and Southwest Asia, Mexico, and Colombia. Heroin can be a white or brown powder or a black sticky substance known as black tar heroin. Other common names for heroin include big H, horse, hell dust, and smack.

■ Heroin can be injected, snorted, or smoked. It can also be mixed with crack cocaine, which is called speedballing.

■ Heroin enters the brain rapidly and binds to opioid receptors on cells, especially those involved in feelings of pain and pleasure and in controlling heart rate, sleeping, and breathing.

■ People who use heroin report feeling a "rush" (or euphoria). Other effects include dry mouth, heavy feelings in the arms and legs, and clouded mental functioning.

■ Heroin is highly addictive. People who regularly use heroin can develop a tolerance, which means that they need higher and/or more frequent doses of the drug to get the desired effects.

■ Long-term effects may include collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses and lung complications. Studies have shown some loss of the brain's white matter, which may affect decision-making, behavior control and responses to stressful situations.

■ Research suggests that misuse of prescription opioid pain medicine is a risk factor for starting heroin use.

■ It is possible to overdose on heroin. Naloxone (Narcan) is a medicine that can treat a heroin overdose when given immediately, though more than one dose may be needed.

■ Withdrawal of heroin includes symptoms such as severe muscle and bone pain, sleep problems, diarrhea, vomiting and severe heroin cravings. Withdrawal symptoms can begin as early as a few hours after the drug was last taken

■ A range of treatments including medicines and behavioral therapies are effective in helping people stop heroin use. Treatment plans should be individualized to meet the needs of the patient.

■ Medicines for heroin treatment include buprenorphine and methadone. They bind to the same opioid receptors in the brain as heroin, but more weakly, reducing cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Another treatment is naltrexone, which blocks opioid receptors and prevents opioid drugs from having an effect.

■ Behavioral therapies for heroin addiction include cognitive-behavioral therapy and contingency management. Cognitive-behavioral therapy helps modify the patient's drug-use expectations and behaviors, and helps effectively manage triggers and stress. Contingency management provides motivational incentives, such as vouchers or small cash rewards for positive behaviors such as staying drug-free. These behavioral treatment approaches are especially effective when used along with medicines.

There are 142 deaths per day due to heroin overdoses in the US. In 2016 there were almost 500 deaths in Nassau and Suffolk county from overdoses. In the first six months of 2017, Glen Cove EMS responded to 18 calls for overdose victims.

The rising number of opioid overdose deaths has led to an increase in public health efforts to make naloxone available to at-risk persons and their families, as well as first responders and others in the community. Some states have passed laws that allow pharmacists to dispense naloxone without a prescription from a person's personal doctor.

For more information about heroin please visit the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) www.drugabuse.gov, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) www.samhsa.gov or the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) www.oasas.ny.gov.

For more information about SAFE contact the office at (516) 676-2008 or <http://www.safegetsovereign.org> or [facebook.com/safeglenecovecoalition](http://www.facebook.com/safeglenecovecoalition).