

Press Release

July 13, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Drug Overdoses On The Rise Since COVID-19

According to a recent article in The Washington Post, suspected overdoses jumped nationally 18 percent in March, 29 percent in April and 42 percent in May, according to the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program, a federal initiative that collects data from ambulance teams, hospitals and police. In some jurisdictions, such as Milwaukee County, dispatch calls for overdoses have increased more than 50 percent.

In Roanoke County, Va., police have responded to twice as many fatal overdoses in recent months as in all of last year. In Kentucky, which just celebrated its first decline in overdose deaths after five years of crisis, many towns are experiencing an abrupt reversal in the numbers.

Nationwide, federal and local officials are reporting alarming spikes in drug overdoses — a hidden epidemic within the coronavirus pandemic. Emerging evidence suggests that the continued isolation, economic devastation and disruptions to the drug trade in recent months are fueling the surge.

Because of how slowly the government collects data, it could be five to six months before definitive numbers exist on the change in overdoses during the pandemic. But data obtained by The Washington Post from a real-time tracker of drug-related emergency calls and interviews with coroners suggest that overdoses have not just increased since the pandemic began but are accelerating as it persists.

Monthly overdoses grew dramatically during the pandemic. For every 10 suspected overdoses reported to ODMAP in May 2019 14 overdoses were reported in May 2020. Overdoses increased up to 42% per month during the pandemic, as compared to the same months in 2019.

When the pandemic hit, some authorities thought drug use would decrease as cities shut down and state borders were shored up. The opposite seems to be happening. As traditional supply lines are disrupted, people who use drugs appear to be seeking out new suppliers and substances they are less familiar with, increasing the risk of overdose and death. Synthetic drugs and less common substances are increasingly showing up in autopsies and toxicology reports, medical examiners say.

Social distancing has also sequestered people, leaving them to take drugs alone and making it less likely that someone else will be there to call 911 or to administer the lifesaving overdose antidote naloxone, also known as Narcan. Making matters worse, many treatment centers, drug courts and recovery programs have been forced to close or significantly scale back during shutdowns. With plunging revenue for services and little financial relief from the government, some now teeter on the brink of financial collapse. Even before the pandemic, experts note, the nation's infrastructure for helping people with substance use disorders was underfunded and inadequate. Without government intervention, local officials and drug policy experts warn, overdoses and deaths will continue to climb during the pandemic and the existing system will be inundated.

As the pandemic has pushed massive doses of fear, uncertainty, anxiety and depression into people's lives, it has cut off the human connections that help ease those burdens. Additionally, unemployment due to COVID-19 compounded the problem.

What's needed, advocates say, is emergency funding to keep afloat treatment programs, recovery centers and needle-exchange programs. Medical associations have also urged federal officials to relax restrictive barriers to opioid treatments such as buprenorphine and called for wider distribution of naloxone. At a time when they are needed most, some treatment centers and addiction clinics have begun closing programs. Addiction is a disease of isolation- when you feel alone, stigmatized and hopeless that you are most vulnerable and at risk.

The Washington Post is a major American daily newspaper published in Washington, D.C. It has taken a leadership role in following the Nations opioid epidemic. Please visit The Post's Opioid Files for more information at www.washingtonpost.com.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled. "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid & COVID-19 Epidemics at www.safeglencove.org.