

Press Release

September 21, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Dr. Sharon Harris

516- 676-2008

safeglencove@yahoo.com

SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: How Do Substance Use Disorders Make People Vulnerable to COVID-19?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), people who smoke or vape, use opioids, or have a Substance Use Disorder (SUD) may be especially susceptible to infection by the virus that causes COVID-19 and associated complications because of its direct challenge to respiratory health.

Risk for severe COVID-19 and death escalates with older age, but is also concentrated among those who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions, including diabetes, cancer, and heart and respiratory diseases. Many of the latter arise from smoking and COVID-19 may further increase risk for death and illness among people who smoke.

Because of impediments to delivering care to this population, people with SUD who develop COVID-19 may also find it more difficult to receive care. Individuals with SUD are more likely to experience homelessness or incarceration than those in the general population, and these circumstances pose unique challenges regarding transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19.

At least 2 million people in the United States have an Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), and more than 10 million people misuse opioids. These individuals may be at increased risk for the most adverse consequences of COVID-19. People who use opioids at high doses medically, or who have OUD face separate challenges to their respiratory health. Because opioids act in the brainstem to slow breathing, their use not only puts the user at risk of life-threatening or fatal overdose, it may also cause a harmful decrease in oxygen in the blood (hypoxemia) which can lead to cardiac, pulmonary, and brain complications. If severe, hypoxemia can result in overdose and death. Chronic respiratory disease is already known to increase mortality.

Methamphetamine is a highly toxic drug that causes pulmonary damage, pulmonary hypertension, and cardiomyopathy; its use has markedly increased in the United States as of late. Methamphetamine constricts the blood vessels, contributing to pulmonary damage and pulmonary hypertension in people who use it. Clinicians should be prepared to monitor the possible adverse effects of methamphetamine use when treating people with COVID-19.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a United States federal-government research institute whose mission is to "lead the Nation in bringing the power of science to bear on drug abuse and addiction". For more information please visit www.drugabuse.gov.

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 and COVID-19 Epidemics at www.safeglencove.org.