

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Opioid Use Disorder and COVID-19: Probable Biological Link to Worsened Outcomes**

A recent article published in the Journal of Substance Use and Misuse finds that COVID-19 may disproportionately affect certain populations with substance use disorders, particularly Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). Researchers highlight three plausible biological mechanisms for potentially worsened outcomes in patients with OUD who contract COVID-19: Respiratory toxicity, immune mechanisms, and drug-drug interactions.

COVID-19 principally targets the lungs, so the virus may pose an especially serious threat to those with respiratory toxicity from opioids (respiratory depression, naloxone failures) or polysubstance use (vaping, marijuana, crack cocaine, etc). Opioid use may result in respiratory depression with resultant hypoxemia; within 6 months of opioid initiation, risks of respiratory depression range 1.9–83.4%, depending on group risk. COVID-19 causes hypoxemia (decrease in oxygen pressure) secondary to viral pneumonia, and in one large New York City case series, prevalence of hypoxemia on hospitalization was 20.4%. Risks of opioid-related respiratory depression are likely amplified in the setting of concomitant hypoxemia from viral pneumonia, and therefore patients using opioids who get COVID-19 may have increased risk of adverse respiratory outcomes.

Opioid users may have additional vulnerability to COVID-19 from opioid suppression of immune function. Opioid drugs are linked to numerous immunosuppressive consequences. such COVID-19 can cause a viral uncontrolled host immune response thought to exacerbate viral disease progression and organ injury. Based on opioid-induced immunosuppression, it is plausible that opioids potentially increase risk of COVID-19 infection and/or progression. Numerous drugs are being administered as potential COVID-19 treatments. These include antibiotic and antiviral drugs, anticoagulants, and immunosuppressants.

There is an urgent need for research to better characterize the role that respiratory toxicity, immune mechanisms, and drug-drug interactions play in worsening outcomes for individuals with OUD infected with COVID-19.

The Journal of Substance Use & Misuse is a peer-reviewed medical journal covering substance abuse. It was established in 1966 as the International Journal of the Addictions, obtaining its current name in 1996. It is published 14 times per year by Taylor & Francis. For more information please visit [www.tandfonline.com](http://www.tandfonline.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](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).