

Coroner: Drug overdose stats stress importance of drug awareness

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
January 3 2015 11:29 PM



Madison County Coroner Steve Nonn released statistics Friday that show drug overdose deaths in Madison County are on the rise, matching a national trend with prescription drug deaths.

The statistics made Nonn even more mindful of the importance of Project Drug Smart and education in schools and the community. The coroner's office, along with the Madison County Sheriff's Department and State's Attorney's Office have been heavily involved in Project Drug Smart in recent years.

The coroner reports that in 2014 there have been 101 overdose deaths and of those, 22 are pending prescription overdose cases. Of the pending prescription overdose cases, four are suspected heroin overdoses.

“We are also involved in drug prevention programs such as Project Drug Smart and with local law enforcement in presenting drug prevention programs to middle school and high schools,” he said. “It is estimated that over 10,000 students have been spoken to on the topic of drug prevention since the beginning of Project Drug Smart in October of 2011.

“We are working together with federal, state, and local law enforcement in aggressive criminal enforcement against drug dealers and also targeting medical professionals who have become purveyors of pill mills for drug addicts,” Nonn said.

Nonn has been proud to be at the forefront of bringing this plague to the public eye and initiate action within the law enforcement community starting with a law enforcement training program in conjunction with the DEA in March, 2011. Since then, the Madison County Coroner’s Office in conjunction with the Madison County State’s Attorney’s Office and the Madison County Sheriff’s Department have been active in prescription drug take back programs, which have been effective in taking unused prescription medicines out of homes and off the streets.

“Please keep in mind that of the 22 pending prescriptions, some might end up being natural causes if the toxicology is negative for drugs, but the circumstances surrounding the death make us suspicious that drugs played a role,” Nonn said. “We are still awaiting toxicology results on those cases.

Nonn said that in 2013 there were a total of 54 overdose deaths. Of those, 22 were heroin overdoses. Heroin deaths remain steady at about the same pace as the past three years, averaging 20 plus deaths each year. The coroner pointed out that if someone looked at the last five years of heroin deaths, they find a substantial increase every year.

“Now prescription drug overdose deaths have the same straight-air spike,” he said. “It’s amazing and not unique to this county. The CDC calls it a plague. We are just talking about overdose deaths in our report, this doesn’t include the ones who overdosed who were dead and brought back to life.”

One of the reasons for the increased use of heroin is its low cost. Nonn said a button of heroin is only \$10, which is less than a ticket to a movie theater. People also don’t realize how extremely addictive heroin is for a person, he added.

“Heroin can get you addicted with one-time use,” he said. “It affects the brain receptors the first time telling the brain it needs that drug. This is why we are in the schools and talking to social organizations or anywhere people will listen to us about how addictive heroin is and get the message out so kids are smarter.”

Nonn said different drugs become popular in almost a cyclical fashion.

“When I was with the sheriff’s department a spike went through with LSD, then cocaine became real popular,” he said. “Heroin has stuck around for a long time. Even if we get this message out and heroin off the street, another drug will take its place.”

Drug addiction knows no bounds to socio-economic status, age or race, Nonn said.

“No school system or subdivision is free of the problem,” he added. “The hospitals are hopping with people being brought in for prescription drug problems.”

One particular case stays with Nonn in regard to heroin. He said he knows a woman, a high-level nursing supervisor, who lost two children to heroin abuse and said she thinks a third would have been lost had she not been incarcerated, he said.

“The girls were all gorgeous and all three became addicted to heroin,” he said. “We need to continue to get the word out in the community about these problems with schools and aggressive law enforcement.”

Confirmed heroin deaths is 22

Confirmed prescription drug overdose is 41 (*This is a representation of pain medications such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, and fentanyl and sometimes in combinations with anti-depressants such as Xanax and Fluoxetine*)

Confirmed ethanol intoxication is 4

Confirmed huffing is 1 (inhaling air duster cans)

Confirmed other illicit drugs, (cocaine, methamphetamine) is 7

The above cited statistics reflects the 75 confirmed drug overdose deaths in Madison County as of today, we still have 22 suspected cases of prescription drug overdose cases waiting on toxicology results as well as four cases of suspected heroin deaths. If all pending cases come back positive, we will have had a total of 101 overdose deaths this year, which is an astounding increase of 47 deaths as compared to last year.

Nonn reported that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has officially declared that prescription drug abuse in the United States is an epidemic.

The following statistics were provided by the CDC

Deaths from drug overdose have been rising steadily over the past two decades and have become the leading cause of injury death in the United States. Every day in the United States, 114 people die as a result of drug overdose, and another 6,748 are treated in emergency departments (ED) for the misuse or abuse of drugs. Nearly 9 out of 10 poisoning deaths are caused by drugs.

The Problem – as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control

Drug overdose was the leading cause of injury death in 2012. Among people 25 to 64 years old, drug overdose caused more deaths than motor vehicle traffic crashes.

Drug overdose death rates have been rising steadily since 1992 with a 117% increase from 1999 to 2012 alone.

In 2012, 33,175 (79.9%) of the 41,502 drug overdose deaths in the United States were unintentional, 5,465 (13.2%) were of suicidal intent, 80 (0.2%) were homicides, and 2,782 (6.7%) were of undetermined intent.

In 2011, drug misuse and abuse caused about 2.5 million emergency department (ED) visits. Of these, more than 1.4 million ED visits were related to pharmaceuticals.

Between 2004 and 2005, an estimated 71,000 children (18 or younger) were seen in EDs each year because of medication overdose (excluding self-harm, abuse and recreational drug use).

80% of heroin users started out as a prescription drug abuser and turned to heroin because it is cheaper, and in most cases, were not aware of the highly addictive nature of the drug.

Most Common Drugs Involved in Overdoses

In 2012, of the 41,502 drug overdose deaths in the United States, 22,114 (53%) were related to pharmaceuticals.

Of the 22,114 deaths relating to pharmaceutical overdose in 2012, 16,007 (72%) involved opioid analgesics (also called opioid pain relievers or prescription painkillers), and 6,524 (30%) involved benzodiazepines. (Some deaths include more than one type of drug).

In 2011, about 1.4 million ED visits involved the nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals. Among those ED visits, 501,207 visits were related to anti-anxiety and insomnia medications, and 420,040 visits were related to opioid analgesics.

Benzodiazepines are frequently found among people treated in EDs for misusing or abusing drugs. People who died of drug overdoses often had a combination of benzodiazepines and opioid analgesics in their bodies.

259 million prescriptions for painkillers were written by Health Care Providers in 2012, enough for every American adult to have a bottle of pills.