



Heroin and prescription drug overdose epidemic continues to increase in Madison County

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Madison County Coroner Stephen P. Nonn is reporting that the current heroin and prescription drug overdose epidemic that continues to climb nationally also continues to increase at an alarming rate in Madison County. As of July 15, 2015, there have been 28 heroin overdose deaths investigated.

The most heroin deaths reported in Madison County since this epidemic first began in 2009 was the 26 deaths recorded in 2011 as well as 2014 with that number already surpassed with 28 deaths this year.

Statistics are not available to track those cases that include those persons who overdosed in Madison County but were transferred or taken to hospitals out of Madison County jurisdiction and died.

In addition to the 28 heroin deaths there have been 11 prescription drug overdose deaths, 1 illicit drug (methamphetamine) death and 2 other cases where drugs were the contributory factor but not the prime factor in the deaths. This brings the total number of overdose deaths at 42 so far this year.

2015 Total Cases: 42

Of the 42 cases, 14 cases are still being investigated awaiting toxicology and autopsy results. There is a high suspicion that the 14 cases are going to be overdoses.

2015 Total Heroin: 28

19 cases have been confirmed heroin overdoses by toxicology and autopsy examination.

Of the 19 confirmed cases, 1 confirmed case was a motor vehicle crash where the driver was under the influence of heroin at the time of the crash. His toxicology revealed elevated levels of morphine and 6-monoacetylmorphine, which is the chemical marker that confirms that heroin is the source of the morphine found in the blood.

“The death of the vehicle crash victim dangerously illustrates how we are all affected by the scourge of heroin usage,” said Coroner Nonn. “Heroin is not just a problem for addicts and their families, as we all have to share the roadway with a heroin impaired driver. This epidemic affects the safety and security of each of us in one form or another.”

Nine cases are still pending toxicology and final autopsy reports. These cases are a high probability that they will be related to heroin due to evidence found at the scene, along with past history of abuse.

2015 Total Prescription: 11

There are a total of 5 confirmed cases of prescription drug overdoses.

There are 6 cases still under investigation awaiting toxicology and final autopsy reports. The investigation in these cases highly suspects a prescription overdose.

The prescription drugs abused in the confirmed cases range from Fentanyl, Methadone, Hydrocodone and Venlafaxine.

2015 Total Other Illicit: 1

1 Confirmed case of cardiac tamponade due to methamphetamine use.

2015 Other cases: 2

1 confirmed case of drowning/hypothermia due to opiate use. In this case the decedent did not test positive for 6-monoacetylmorphine, but syringes and an empty capsule were found at the scene.

1 confirmed case of hypertensive cardiovascular disease exacerbated by methadone.

Here is a summary of cases handled since 2009:

2009:

Total Overdose Deaths: 35

7 - Heroin

24 - Prescription

4 – Other Illicit

2010:

Total Overdose Deaths: 60

18 - Heroin

36 - Prescription

6 – Other Illicit

2011:

Total Overdose Deaths: 53

26 - Heroin

17 - Prescription

7 – Other Illicit

2 – Alcohol

1 - Bath Salts

2012:

Total Overdose Deaths: 62

22 - Heroin

33 - Prescription

7 – Other Illicit

2013:

Total Overdose Deaths: 53

24 - Heroin

22 - Prescription

6 – Other Illicit

1 - Alcohol

2014:

Total Overdose Cases: 92

26 - Heroin

56 - Prescription

6 – Other Illicit

4 - Alcohol

According the Center for Disease Control, approximately 120 people die each day in the United States of a drug overdose. Heroin involved overdose deaths nearly doubled

between 2011 and 2013; more than 8,200 people died in 2013 alone. Since 2002 there has been a 286 percent increase in heroin-related deaths.

Through the Madison County Heroin Task Force, Project Drug Smart, the Federal Task Force and continued screenings and panel discussion of the film *The Heroin Project* throughout the community, targeted efforts have been implemented to address the increase of heroin addiction and deaths. These efforts have included stepped-up law enforcement in identifying and arresting the drug dealers, expanded access to effective treatment centers along with the use of the drugs Suboxone and Vivitrol, that have proven to be effective in treating addiction. There is also pending Federal and State legislation that supports increasing the availability and use of the drug Naloxone, also known as Narcan, which is used to revive a person who has overdosed on heroin. Continued drug awareness education in local schools and throughout the community is a priority of the task force.

The Task Force has made a long term commitment to drug education in the community. One bright spot that can be cited is that no heroin related deaths of school aged persons have occurred since the inception of a heroin education team which has addressed over 12,000 students in Madison County over the past two years. “We still have such a long road ahead of us to end the grief and suffering, but it is reassuring that I have not had a death certificate cross my desk with a high school student’s name on it along with the words ‘heroin overdose’ since we began the full court press of public information and education in 2013”, Nonn added.

The CDC reports that “to reverse this trend we need an all-of-society response – to improve opioid prescribing practices to prevent addiction, expand access to effective treatment for those who are addicted, increase use of naloxone to reverse overdoses and work with law enforcement partners to reduce the supply of heroin.”

“There is no doubt that a long term commitment and resolve will be required to check this crisis, but I do believe that the criminal justice, medical, and social service communities are all rallying to try to contain this beast of a problem,” Coroner Nonn concluded.