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State, partners build more Narcan kits for statewide distribution

Police departments report kits are saving lives

August 18, 2017 ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, the Anchorage Opioid Task Force and volunteers built more than 1,600 opioid overdose response kits on Wednesday night. The kits will be distributed across Alaska as part of the state’s ongoing response to a growing opioid misuse epidemic. From 2009 to 2015, the number of heroin-related deaths in the state quadrupled. In 2015, there were 67 deaths related to prescription opioids — nearly twice the overdose deaths related to heroin. Deaths related to the use of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl have also been documented.

A state public health program, Project HOPE, provides the overdose response kits, at no charge, to people at risk from opioid overdose. Narcan ([naloxone](#)) temporarily blocks or reverses the effects of opioids. Project HOPE has distributed approximately 6,200 kits to partner agencies statewide in the past six months.

A grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is funding the project.

“We really appreciate the help we’ve gotten from public volunteers and our distribution partners as we work together to limit the harm that opioids — both prescription and illegal — are doing in our state,” said Alaska Chief Medical Officer Dr. Jay Butler. “Addiction is a health condition, and like a defibrillator helps respond to cardiac arrest, these kits are one of the key ways we’re addressing this public health crisis in Alaska.”

Each of the kits contains:

- two doses of Narcan
- sanitary gloves
- a brochure on how to administer Narcan

In February 2017, Governor Bill Walker declared a public health crisis that enabled wider distribution of naloxone. Since then, several distribution partners, including police departments and community organizations, have begun to use the lifesaving drug and report it has saved lives. DHSS is aware of more than three dozen instances where it appears a life was saved through the use of these kits.

For a map of distributing agencies, go to opioids.alaska.gov and click on the Narcan availability button. Partner agencies give training on how to recognize the signs of an overdose and use the kit. Responders who use the kit should also call 911. Some synthetic opioids, stronger than

heroin, require multiple doses of Narcan to reverse an overdose. The kits do not counteract drugs other than opioids.

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