



KENOSHA COUNTY
OPIOID TASK FORCE

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News release

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Contact: Kari Foss

262-605-6686

Kari.Foss@kenoshacounty.org

**Amid local and national spikes in overdose deaths,
life-saving resources remain available**

Drug overdose deaths in Kenosha County increased by 57 percent during a recent 12-month period compared with the year prior, far surpassing a disturbing national trend, leaders of the Kenosha County Opioid Task Force announced today.

During the 12-month span ending in April 2021, Kenosha County recorded 55 toxicity deaths, according to statistics from the Medical Examiner's Office. This compares with 35 such deaths during the same period the year before.

This timeframe was highlighted in recent provisional data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, indicating there were an estimated 100,306 overdose deaths nationwide in those 12 months, a 28.5 percent increase from the 78,056 deaths a year earlier.

It marked the first time the United States lost more than 100,000 lives to drug overdoses during a 12-month period.

“Nationally, the picture is bleak, and it is unfortunately no less alarming locally,” said Kenosha County Medical Examiner Patrice Hall, a participant in the Kenosha County Opioid Task Force. “While 2019 showed a marked reduction of toxicity deaths in our county, there have been a number of rough months since the onset of the pandemic.”

Toxicity deaths include those due to abuse of any drugs, such as alcohol, cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, prescription medications, or a combination of thereof.

In Kenosha County, there are many resources available for people struggling with substance abuse disorder, noted Kari Foss, chairperson of the Opioid Task Force. These include recovery

groups and counseling services, peer support resources, medication-assisted treatment, Narcan training, and more.

Founded in 2017, the Opioid Task Force earlier this year became a subcommittee of the Kenosha County Substance Abuse Coalition, which offers information and links to resources on its website, <https://www.saveliveskenosha.org>. There, resource pages may be accessed directly at <https://www.saveliveskenosha.org/learn-more/>.

Hard copies of a resource card that the coalition has created are also available at the Aging, Disability and Behavioral Health table in the main lobby of the Kenosha County Job Center, 8600 Sheridan Road, Kenosha.

“This is truly a matter of life and death, and it’s important that we remove the stigma and make sure that people who are struggling with substance use know that there are places to turn for help, and that their loved ones also know help is available,” Foss said.

Kenosha County Health Officer Dr. Jen Freiheit, a co-chair of the Substance Abuse Coalition, encourages people who are using opioids — or those who believe they may find themselves around users — to equip themselves with Narcan, a medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.

Free training and supplies of Narcan are available from Kenosha County Public Health, with more information available at <https://bit.ly/KCNarcan> or 262-605-6741.

“Narcan has saved many lives in Kenosha County, and it’s free and easy to access for anyone in the community,” Freiheit said. “Many times, saving a life is the first step toward recovery, and it’s important to remember that while the numbers look bleak, recovery is possible.”

Other community resources:

Vivent Health offers fentanyl test strips, allowing users to determine the presence of fentanyl — an opioid that can be deadly in very small quantities — in other substances. For more information, call 262-657-6644.

The Kenosha County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Resource Center, which can link people to many resources, may be reached from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday at 262-764-8555.

The Kenosha County crisis hotline operated by Kenosha Human Development Services is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, at 262-657-7188.

Death statistics in Kenosha County, including month-by-month breakdowns and toxicity deaths by drug type, are available on the Medical Examiner’s Office website, at <https://www.kenoshacounty.org/2001/Death-Statistics>.

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