New Jersey to Deliver More than 11,000 Doses of Opioid-Overdose Antidote Naloxone to EMS Teams Throughout State

Effort Builds Upon Naloxone Distribution to Residents, Police, Libraries & Homeless Shelters & Standing Orders at Pharmacies;

Naloxone Also Now Part of NJ's Prescription Assistance Program for Older Residents

Sept. 3, 2020

(TRENTON) – Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson and Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli today announced the state is sending 11,352 free doses of the opioid-overdose antidote naloxone (commonly called Narcan) to 179 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) teams throughout New Jersey.

"The opioid epidemic continues to take far too many of our friends and neighbors," Commissioner Johnson said. "We've previously made naloxone available at no cost to residents, police departments, libraries and homeless shelters, and making it available for free to EMS teams is a sensible next step. We are committed to making naloxone as readily available as possible to as many people as possible – to save as many lives as possible."

"New Jersey continues to battle the overdose epidemic which is being compounded by the current COVID-19 health emergency," said Health Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli. "New Jersey EMS clinicians have been responding to an increase in overdoses in the state and we want to ensure they have tools they need to care for patients."

The Commissioners recently sent a letter to all New Jersey EMS agencies asking if they wanted to participate in this initiative to provide naloxone at no cost. Naloxone reverses overdoses from opioids by blocking the effects of opioids on the brain, and it's being distributed proportionally based on the number of agency administrations last year.

"EMS teams are on the frontline of this epidemic," Commissioner Johnson said. "This is another tool in our effort to save lives."

The Murphy administration has focused on increasing access to naloxone as part of our comprehensive fight to combat the opioid epidemic. Examples of the Administration's steps to increase access to this lifesaving medication include:

- As of July 1, naloxone is a covered medication in the Pharmaceutical Assistance to the Aged and Disabled (PAAD) program. PAAD is a state program managed by Human Services that helps eligible older residents and individuals with disabilities save money on prescription drug costs.
- Human Services has also distributed more than 86,000 doses for free naloxone across the state including:
    - 32,000 doses of free naloxone to New Jersey residents,
    - 53,000 free doses to police departments,
    - 400 free doses to libraries and
    - 1,200 free doses to homeless shelters.
    - Health issued more than 1,000 standing orders, which covers nearly 1,500 pharmacists in the state since 2017, giving residents access to naloxone without a prescription.

Last fall, the Department of Health launched the "Five Minutes to Help Program" training initiative for EMS to improve connections to care for non-fatal overdose victims. The program has trained responders on interacting with patients following treatment from a suspect opioid overdose, linking patients to resources they need and reducing the number of repeat overdose patients. Last year, more than 100 individuals were trained and more than 600 resource kits were distributed. This year, the Department of Health plans to expand the training, focusing on compassion fatigue, harm-reduction trauma-informed care, and reducing stigma around mental health.

"EMS personnel are often the only medical providers individuals with substance use disorder interact with—their role is vital to not only the care of the patient during and after a reversal, but also to help create a bridge to treatment," added Commissioner Persichilli. "Through these programs, New Jersey is helping to pave the road to recovery."

Commissioner Johnson also reminded residents that they can call the 1-844-ReachNJ helpline around-the-clock daily to speak with live trained addiction treatment counselors and to get connected to treatment, regardless of insurance status.

"We want to remind people that they are not alone," Commissioner Johnson said. "These are challenging times for everyone, but help is available and recovery is possible."

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