



NEWS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

VALERIE A. ARKOOSH, MD, MPH, CHAIR
KENNETH E. LAWRENCE, JR., VICE CHAIR
JOSEPH C. GALE, COMMISSIONER

Contact:

Kaitlyn Foti, Press Secretary

610-278-3062 kfoti@montcopa.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: OCT. 17, 2017



Officials Announce 4 Percent Decrease in Accidental Drug-Related Deaths in Montgomery County

Norristown, PA (Oct. 17, 2017) – Montgomery County officials released the statistics on overdose deaths in the county from the first and second quarter of 2017, which showed a 4 percent decrease from the first half of 2016.

There were 111 accidental drug-related deaths in the first half of 2017 marking a 4 percent decrease over the same time period from last year. In the first two quarters of 2016, there were 116 accidental drug deaths.

“After years of watching these numbers increase, we are proud of the work being done to combat the opioid epidemic that is having a devastating toll on the region,” said Dr. Val Arkoosh, Chair, Montgomery County Commissioners. “This is not a victory lap but a chance to recognize the impact of the men and women across Montgomery County who work in law enforcement, EMS, and human services to save the lives of those battling substance use disorder.”

The second quarter of 2017 marks six straight quarters without a significant increase in accidental drug-related deaths in Montgomery County.

“The coroner’s office is working hard to ensure that the overdose epidemic’s toll is being accurately recorded in the county. The data released today highlights the continued need for Naloxone availability, and the continued need for regulation and oversight on prescription opioids,” said Dr. Michael Milbourne, Coroner, Montgomery County.

The announcement was made at the start of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Overdose Task Force. The task force has been working on the frontlines of the battle against accidental deaths drug-related deaths since September 2014, when it was formed by then-County Commissioner Josh Shapiro (now Pennsylvania Attorney General) to analyze the issue of increased opioid deaths and provide recommendations on how the county could help combat the epidemic.

In addition to the first and second quarter statistics, representatives spoke about the ongoing urgency in the battle against substance use disorder and drug overdoses facing the region. The increasing presence of fentanyl found in overdose victims presents further challenges due to the potency of the drug.

Of the 123 drug-related deaths between January and June 2017, which include accidental, suicide, and undetermined deaths, 89 involved fentanyl.

“Our entire law enforcement community combined with our dedicated prosecutors and county personnel are working hard to make sure that far fewer families experience the kind of loss and pain that an overdose death brings,” said Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin Steele. “Everyone in law enforcement is committed to stopping this flow of poison, especially fentanyl, in our communities and killing far too many people. Each person who has died from a drug overdose is one too many.”

The availability of Naloxone throughout the county is one of the tools the county has utilized in the battle against drug-related deaths. Arkoosh, then serving as the interim medical director of the Montgomery County Health Department, issued a standing order in 2015 to allow all county pharmacies to distribute Naloxone over the counter.

Naloxone is also available at county health clinics and carried by EMS and police throughout the county. There is also a Naloxone education and distribution event scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5 at the Patient Care Center Conference Center at Eagleville Hospital, Room 216. Two more events are taking place in Pennsburg and Pottstown in 2018. Interested parties can find more information and register online at www.montcopa.org/naloxoneregistration.

A West Pottsgrove resident, Steven Harris, spoke at the meeting about his experience being revived with Naloxone multiple times before entering recovery.

“I just want to let you know that your work is not in vain,” Harris said. “There is still hope for the hopeless.”

Anyone seeking treatment for themselves or a friend or family member with substance use disorder can find resources at www.montcopa.org/overdoseprevention or by calling 800-221-6333.