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**TO:** Public News Media Sources

**FROM:** Joel R. Strasz, Health Officer

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**RE: BAY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES ADVISORY TO PUBLIC AND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS ON HEROIN/OPIATE OVERDOSE**

Due to the recent reports of fatal and non-fatal opiate overdoses in Bay County, the Bay County Health Department is issuing a public health advisory to address the growing opioid addiction epidemic, and announcing immediate action steps to combat overdoses and increase treatment availability.

**The Epidemiology of Heroin-Associated Deaths in Bay County**

Vital statistics data indicate that the number of deaths of Bay County residents due to drug overdose has increased significantly within the last 10 years (from 5 cases in 2005 to 25 in 2012, 21 in 2013 and 18 in 2014). The data on opioid overdose and addiction point clearly to the extent of this serious public health crisis.

- According to Riverhaven Substance Abuse Services, Bay County adults seeking treatment for addiction with heroin as their primary drug has risen from less than two percent in 2005 to twenty percent in 2014. Bay County adults seeking treatment with opiates as their primary drug has risen from 15% in 2005 to 48% in 2014.
- In the same time period, Riverhaven reports that the number of Bay County adolescents seeking treatment for heroin and opioid addiction has remained consistently lower than adults, averaging between 0-2% with the exception of the years 2011-2012.
- Comparing results to the 12 county region that Riverhaven covers, the numbers for adults and adolescents seeking treatment with heroin and opioids as their primary drug is nearly identical to Bay County.
- The total number of Bay County residents reporting to Emergency Rooms for all drug overdoses in 2015 is 125 as of last week.
- Preliminary data suggest that unintentional overdose deaths for the first six months of 2015 are at least as high as 2014, and may reach levels corresponding to 2012.

**General information for people affected by addiction**

More can be done by the public, health care providers, and the media to inform individuals and families about services that can help them. Bay County has a robust system to combat opiate addiction including prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery support services for people who are affected by addiction. Treatment programs are available for adolescents, adults and families. Funding is available to support persons who are uninsured or under-insured. Support groups are available for loved ones.

The Mid-State Health Network provides free and confidential information and referrals for alcohol and other drug abuse problems and related concerns. The Mid-State Health Network will answer questions regarding alcohol and drug use, and discuss options for those needing treatment services. If services are determined to be appropriate, Mid-State will assist callers in choosing a provider that meets their needs, and will make the necessary referral. Services are available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. If you need help, call the toll-free number (800-448-5498).

### **Extending the Health and Lives of Persons Who Abuse Opiates**

People who are abusing opiates are at high risk for experiencing a number of serious health consequences, including liver disease, Hepatitis C and HIV infection, overdose and death. Opiate addicted individuals live approximately 15 years less than people who do not have the disease. The Health Department is working diligently with other first responders and organizations in the community to link individuals with as many treatment alternatives and disease prevention programs as possible. Some examples include resources to decrease disease transmission through programs that curb the use of used needles and ensuring access to substances like naloxone, (sometimes known as Narcan), that can reverse an overdose if given in a timely manner.

There are also many treatment options to consider. Many people enter treatment multiple times prior to maintaining recovery. Consider all of the treatment possibilities, including inpatient detoxification, outpatient detoxification through opiate treatment programs and the use of medication assisted treatment, including methadone, buprenorphine and injectable naltrexone. The effectiveness of these medications are enhanced when combined with out-patient counseling and/or residential treatment to support behavioral changes necessary for long term recovery.

### **Information for friends and families with opiate addicted loved ones**

Addiction affects the entire family. When a person you care about is addicted to opiates, this extremely stressful and confusing situation can affect your physical and mental well-being. For this reason it is important to seek support in coping with a friend or family member with this chronic medical illness. Professional counseling, for individuals or families, is available throughout the state. Additionally there are numerous peer support groups available in the community including Peer 360, Al-Anon and Narcotics-Anonymous. It is also critical for the general public to be aware of the signs and symptoms of an overdose. The following guidance can be of help:

### **Differentiating between an Overdose and Opioid Intoxication (“High”)**

<b>INTOXICATION (“HIGH”)</b>	<b>OVERDOSE</b>
Muscles become relaxed	Pale, clammy skin
Speech is slowed / slurred	Very infrequent or no breathing
Sleepy looking	Deep snoring or gurgling (death rattle)
Responsive to stimuli (such as shaking, yelling, sternal rub, etc.)	Not responsive to stimuli (such as shaking, yelling, sternal rub, etc.)
Normal heart beat / pulse	Slow heart beat / pulse
Normal skin tone	Blue lips and / or fingertips

In order to determine if the individual is experiencing an overdose, the most important things to consider are presence of breathing and responsiveness to stimulation. There are some relatively harmless ways to stimulate a person. These strategies are:

- yelling their name, and if they do not respond,
- rubbing knuckles over either the upper lip or up and down the front of the rib cage (called a sternal rub).

If an individual responds to these stimuli, they may not be experiencing an overdose at that time. If a person does respond to stimuli, it is always best to stay with the person to make sure the person remains alert and awake for a period of time. It is possible that the person could become unresponsive and would need immediate assistance.

### **Information for the general public**

All communities are impacted by opiate addiction and all individuals can assist in reducing opiate abuse and addiction. Below are some suggestions for getting involved in creating a healthy community:

- Lock up all medications that can be abused to keep them out of reach of persons with addictive disorders, curious teens and children who may unintentionally swallow them.

- Dispose of unused prescription medications. The Yellow Jug drug disposal program has several sites around the county where anyone can drop off unused medications for proper disposal. To find a drop off box go to <http://www.bcpreventionnetwork.com/drug-disposal.html>
- Strongly discourage the use of alcohol in amongst youth. There is a strong correlation between underage drinking and the later development of substance use disorders, including opiate addiction. Prevention efforts should start here.
- Parents can talk to their children about alcohol and drug use and its consequences. For some suggestions to start the conversation go to [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)
- The Bay County Prevention Network has many materials available through its website, for more information go to <http://www.bcpreventionnetwork.com/>

### **Information for health care providers**

Medical, mental health and addiction treatment providers can all play a role in educating patients about addictive disorders, screening for behaviors that put people at risk for developing addictive disorders and intervening and referring people to treatment when the disorder is identified. Below are some suggestions to incorporate into practice along with some available resources.

- Routinely screen for substance use disorders and at risk behaviors in all medical and behavioral health care settings. For more information on Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment, go to <http://www.drugabuse.gov/nidamed-medical-health-professionals> .
- Mental health and addiction providers should integrate overdose prevention education into group, family and individual treatment of people who are abusing opiates or likely to witness an overdose. For more information please read the BSAS Best Practice Guidance on this topic at <http://prescribetoprevent.org/>
- All providers should be knowledgeable about appropriate referrals for treatment. Information can be obtained by contacting the Bay Arenac Behavioral Health Authority at 1-800-448-5498 or the Mid State Health Network by calling their toll-free number at 800-448-5498 or accessing their website at <http://www.midstatehealthnetwork.org/> .
- The Michigan Automated Prescription System (MAPS) is the prescription monitoring program for the State of Michigan. Prescription monitoring programs are used to identify and prevent drug diversion at the prescriber, pharmacy and patient levels by collecting Schedule 2-5 controlled substances prescriptions dispensed by pharmacies and practitioners. For more information on the MAPS system please visit the website at [www.michigan.gov/mimapsinfo](http://www.michigan.gov/mimapsinfo)
- The State of Michigan has recently changed the law to allow first responders (police, fire, EMS, etc.) to carry and administer naloxone (Narcan). Naloxone can also be made widely available through standing order prescription in pharmacies to those likely to witness an overdose. For information on the new Michigan law that allows family and friends of persons abusing opiates to be prescribed naloxone please go to the following links: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2013-2014/billanalysis/Senate/pdf/2013-SFA-0857-N.pdf> and [www.networkforphl.org/\\_asset/qz5pvn/network-naloxone-10-4.pdf](http://www.networkforphl.org/_asset/qz5pvn/network-naloxone-10-4.pdf) .

All providers should be informed about evidence-based practices that are proven effective to treat opiate addiction, including the use of medication assisted treatment. For more information please read the Best Practice Guidance on this topic at [http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4742/Overdose\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4742/Overdose_Toolkit.pdf) .