

BUNCOMBE SCHOOL OFFICERS EQUIPPED TO REVERSE ODs

Asheville Citizen-Times, Jennifer Bowman, Sept. 6, 2017



Narcan kits were distributed to Buncombe County school resource officers Wednesday, Sept. 6, marking the first time the opioid-reversal kits would be available in area middle and high schools. (Photo: Jennifer Bowman/jbowman@citizen-times.com)

ASHEVILLE — It's a product they hope they'll never use. But it may save lives.

About 10 officers in Buncombe County's middle and high schools were trained Wednesday on how to administer opioid overdose-reversal kits, also known as Narcan. It's the first time county schools will have naloxone nasal spray, which can reverse an overdose and almost instantly bring a victim back to sobriety.

Now, school officers will join campus nurses among those able to administer naloxone.

Officials said as the opioid epidemic has worsened, schools across North Carolina have decided to carry the Narcan kits to stop children from falling victim. Local schools have even heard requests from parents to carry naloxone, said Alice Elio, school health program manager at Mountain Area Health Education Center.

Cost and school medication policies had previously prevented Buncombe schools from carrying the kits. A \$180,000 state grant awarded to Vaya Health this year covered the Narcan kits, and Elio worked with Buncombe County's student services to create a new policy, based on North Carolina's standing order that allows naloxone to be dispensed without a prescription.

"School resource officers are there," Elio said. "They're present. This gives more broad access."

While opioid abuse continues to be a national issue — opioids were involved in more than 33,000 deaths in 2015, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — North Carolina is one of several states that have seen sharp increases in fatal overdoses. Between 2014 and 2015, its overdose death rate jumped by 14.5 percent.

Some 90 percent of adults with a substance use disorder start using drugs before the age of 18, half of whom started using by age 15, according to MAHEC.

"No one wants to see a young person develop a substance use problem or overdose on heroin or prescription painkillers," Vaya CEO Brian Ingraham said in a statement. "But more importantly, no one wants to see an

overdose result in a death that could have been prevented. Keeping Narcan on hand is similar to having epinephrine available for someone experiencing a severe allergic reaction. It just makes good sense."

Several state actions have improved access to naloxone. In 2013, then-Gov. Pat McCrory signed the Good Samaritan



Buncombe County sheriff's deputies prepare a Narcan kit as part of training school resource officers Wednesday, Sept. 6. (Photo: Jennifer Bowman/jbowman@citizen-times.com)

Law, allowing witnesses to seek help for someone experiencing a drug overdose without being prosecuted for possession of small amounts of drugs, paraphernalia or underage drinking. It also removed civil liabilities from those who administer naloxone.

Roughly 60 percent of retail pharmacies in North Carolina sell naloxone, according to state data.

Buncombe County officers started carrying naloxone kits this year. Between January and May - before officers had the kits - the sheriff's department responded to 88 reported drug overdoses.

Sgt. Michael Murphy, who led the training Wednesday, said sheriff's deputies have used naloxone six times. Each time the subject has been revived from the overdose, he said.

Officers used naloxone as early as Tuesday morning, when they revived a 57-year-old man using five doses of Narcan.

But Murphy cautioned officers: Opioids, specifically fentanyl, posed a danger to them, too. He told them to take care when handling and packaging the substances, as some nurses and officers throughout the U.S. have received naloxone doses after exposure.

"This stuff will kill you," he said to the school officers.



Buncombe County school officers now will have Narcan kits after receiving training Wednesday, Sept. 6. From left: Capt. Randy Smart, Buncombe County Sheriff's Office; Alice Elio, MAHEC's school health program manager; Lt. Mike Ruby, Buncombe County Sheriff's Office; Jesse Smathers, specialty populations clinical director at Vaya Health; and Sgt. Michael Murphy, Buncombe County Sheriff's Office. (Photo: courtesy photo)

Read the article in the Asheville Citizen Times: <http://tinyurl.com/reverse-ODs>

Read more at:

WLOS: <http://tinyurl.com/school-nurse-training>

Blue Ridge Public Radio: <http://tinyurl.com/combat-overdoses>