Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Understanding the Facts:

Opioid and Fentanyl Use Among Youth

Know the Facts to Keep Our Youth Safe

Youth can be exposed to opioids without a history of dependence.

Fact: Young people encounter opioids through prescriptions for pain, peer experimentation, using substances they do not know have opioids in them, or recreational use without previous signs of dependency.

Why It Matters: Awareness prevents unwarranted fear, helps reduce stigma, and promotes responsible medication management.

Fentanyl can cause overdose through unintentional use.

Fact: Fentanyl is extremely potent and can cause overdose, even in small amounts, and it's often unknowingly present in counterfeit pills or mixed with other substances.

Why It Matters Recognize the risks of accidental exposure and the importance of caution.

Prescription opioids can still be dangerous.

Fact: Misusing prescription opioids can lead to dependance and overdose. Proper storage and disposal are important to help prevent misuse.

Why It Matters: Emphasize responsible use and the dangers of sharing medication.

Overdose risk includes middle and high school students.

Fact: Middle and high school students are also at risk, especially due to counterfeit pills and fentanyl-laced substances.

Why It Matters: Early prevention and awareness empower students to make informed decisions.

Signs of overdose are not always obvious.

Fact: Overdose can happen without obvious signs. Slow or shallow breathing may be the only visible sign, and it can be deadly.

Why It Matters: Being alert and knowing how to respond can save lives.

Opioids can be ingested in multiple ways.

Fact: Opioids can cause overdose through swallowing, snorting, injection, or vaping.

Why It Matters: Risks are present in all forms of use.

Fentanyl may be found in counterfeit or non-illicit products.

Fact: Fentanyl is being increasingly mixed into legal substances, like nasal spray or eye drops, as well as illicit substances, like counterfeit pills, leading to accidental exposure.

Why It Matters: Exercise caution with all substances.

Effective prevention requires more than just sharing information.

Fact: While knowledge is important, building trusting relationships, offering support, and promoting mental and emotional wellness are essential to reduce substance use.

Why It Matters: Community-wide efforts and family involvement are vital for prevention.

Naloxone can be effective in partial doses.

Fact: Even partial doses of naloxone can help reduce overdose severity and buy time until emergency help arrives. You cannot overdose on naloxone.

Why It Matters: Every dose can make a difference—call 911 immediately.

Naloxone is safe to use.

Fact: Naloxone is very safe and does not cause harm or overdose in someone who is not opioid-overdosed, even if they are pregnant.

Why It Matters: It's safe to keep naloxone accessible and administer it in emergencies.

Anyone can learn to administer naloxone.

Fact: Naloxone can be administered by anyone, even without training. Naloxone products come with instructions. However, training is advised for anyone who knows someone at risk of an opioid overdose, works with those at risk, or is interested in helping their community. Training is simple and widely available. Some organizations, like the Red Cross, offer easy to access training online.

Why It Matters: Empowering communities saves lives.

Providing naloxone supports recovery and survival.

Fact: Naloxone saves lives and does not encourage substance use. It provides a critical safety net in case someone experiences an overdose. People who use opioids cannot use Naloxone to reverse an overdose and immediately continue to use opioids. Naloxone causes debilitating opioid withdrawal symptoms, such as severe pain and vomiting. Naloxone is a life-saving, last-resort treatment, not a way to keep using substances.

Why It Matters: Focus on saving lives and providing hope for recovery.

Naloxone cannot be reliably self-administered.

Fact: If someone is experiencing an opioid overdose, they will likely experience full or partial unconsciousness. Naloxone cannot be self-administered in such states. Further, opioid overdoses can proceed rapidly, so someone may be able to start the process of administering naloxone to themselves but ultimately lose consciousness before actually administering it.

Why It Matters: Bystander awareness and understanding of substance use is important to saving lives.

No substance is safe before the brain is fully developed.

Fact: The brain develops rapidly during youth, and these changes don't slow down until around age 25, on average. During this time, use of any substance, even legal ones, can impact healthy development.

Why It Matters: Emphasize the importance of abstinence or moderation around all substances, particularly prior to the age of 25.

Risk factors for substance use are not the same for everyone.

Fact: Even though there are some common risk factors for opioid or substance use, they can vary from person to person. Just because someone has been exposed to certain risk factors, does not mean they will develop a substance use disorder, and vice versa.

Why It Matters: Look for symptoms, not stereotypes. It is important to remember that anyone can be at risk of a substance use disorder, and anyone can overcome one, too.

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