

Overdose Prevention Campaign



The Overdose Prevention Act

On May 2, 2013, Governor Christie signed the *Overdose Prevention Act* into law. Below is a brief summary of the new law, as well as a sample of reasons why its passage was a responsible and necessary public health intervention.

Why do we need overdose prevention legislation in New Jersey?

Drug overdose is a major public health problem and the leading cause of accidental death both in New Jersey and nationally. Almost 6,000 people in our state have died from drug overdoses since 2004 and more than 700 died in 2009 alone. State action is necessary in order to meaningfully address these tragic numbers.

What does the *Overdose Prevention Act* do?

The law offers protection for those who experience or witness any drug overdose and seek medical attention from arrest, charge, prosecution and conviction for obtaining, possessing, using, being under the influence of, and failing to make lawful disposition of drugs; using or possessing drug paraphernalia; and revocation of parole and probation based on these charges. Legal protection does not extend to outstanding warrants, drug sales and other non-drug related crimes.

In addition, the statute encourages expanded access to naloxone, a medication that blocks the effects of opioid drugs such as heroin, oxycodone and methadone and rapidly reverses the respiratory depression that results from an overdose. Because naloxone is only available by prescription it is not widely accessible to those in a position to immediately render assistance in an overdose situation, such as peers and family members. The *Overdose Prevention Act* provides explicit civil and criminal protection to medical professionals and laypeople who prescribe and administer naloxone in an overdose situation.

How will the *Overdose Prevention Act* save lives in New Jersey?

The legal protections contained in the *Act* are designed to encourage overdose victims and witnesses to seek medical assistance in the event of an overdose emergency, as well as facilitate access to naloxone among those best in a position to save a life.

Although the effects of a drug overdose are reversible with prompt medical attention, studies show that help is rarely sought in these situations. By guaranteeing limited legal protection from arrest and prosecution, the law eliminates fear as a major barrier to help-seeking.

Furthermore, placing naloxone in the hands of at-risk individuals, as well as their friends and family members, will better ensure that those in an immediate position to help an overdose victim are able to effectively do so.

The law is in effect now. Spreading awareness is crucial if we want people to take advantage of the law. Educational posters and palm cards detailing the legal protection for people who call for help in overdose situations are available free of charge from the Drug Policy Alliance. To place an order, please call 609-396-8613 or email nj@drugpolicy.org. The materials may also be downloaded from our website at www.drugpolicy.org/njodinfo.