



This is an official **DHEC Health Advisory**

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Resources to Prevent Opioid Overdoses in South Carolina

Background

Since March 2020, South Carolina has seen a steady increase in suspected opioid overdoses and first responder Narcan® administrations. In May alone, EMS responded to an estimated 915 suspected opioid overdoses in South Carolina, the highest monthly number in the state's history, and nearly twice that reported for May 2019. Year-to-date, suspected opioid overdoses were 50% higher than for the same timeframe last year. Preliminary data suggests an upward trend in overdoses from both prescribed and illicit substances and overdoses involving other drugs like benzodiazepines but is not conclusive.

South Carolina expects COVID-19 to have a continued negative impact on substance use and to cause higher risk of overdose in the coming months. Prescribers and dispensers are encouraged to take preventive strategies.

Recommendations for Prescribers

- **Prescribe and encourage acceptance of naloxone** for any patient with an opioid prescription or with a history of substance use. If patients have insurance concerns, community distributors offer free doses of Narcan®. Review naloxone prescription and patient education procedures as needed. For more information: <http://naloxonesavessc.org/>
- Help identify and intervene with patients at risk for psychosocial or healthcare problems related to substance use using the **Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) model**, which is a billable service. For a free, short online training: <http://scsbirt.com/>
- Inform patients of safe medication disposal sites for unused prescriptions. For a location near you: <http://justplainkillers.com/drug-safety/>
- **Encourage patients to safely store medications in a locked container.**
- Share information in waiting areas and patient rooms about the **SC HOPES support line**, recently established to provide residents with resources to deal with substance use or mental health issues related to COVID-19. The statewide support line can be reached 24/7, toll-free, at 1 (844) SC-HOPES (724-6737). Callers will be connected with trained clinicians who can address

their specific needs. You can bulk order referral cards at <https://www.daodas.sc.gov/sc-hopes-card-orders/>

DHEC activities to address overdoses

- DHEC's Division of EMS created the Law Enforcement Officer Naloxone (LEON) and Reduction of Opioid Loss of Life (ROLL) programs to train law enforcement and fire department agencies across South Carolina to identify, treat and report drug overdoses attributed to opioids.
- The Community Opioid Paramedic Education or COPE program is a post overdose outreach program in which Narcan rescued individuals are assessed for wellness, given harm reduction information, offered a HIV and Hepatitis C test and are provided access to treatment.
- The Opioid Emergency Response Team (OERT) Rapid Response Team met weekly since April 2020 to monitor data from the Bureau of EMS and Trauma on suspected opioid overdoses at the state level. This group issued bulletins on behalf of the OERT to key stakeholder groups for situational awareness. The collaborative effort enabled state-level staff to engage county-level counterparts in high-burden areas to encourage targeted response efforts.