

TOMPKINS COUNTY WHOLE HEALTH
Frank Kruppa – Whole Health Commissioner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 9, 2023

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Health Alert: Increase in Opioid Related Deaths in Tompkins County; Narcan Training and Distribution Available to the Community

(Ithaca, NY, Aug 9, 2023) – Tompkins County Whole Health is alerting the community to an increase in opioid related deaths in Tompkins County, as updated data has become available from the Tompkins County Medical Examiner's Office.

Within the first half of this year (January-June 2023), there have already been 17 reported [drug-related overdose deaths](#) in Tompkins County. Compared to annual totals from the past 5 years in Tompkins County, this represents a significant increase in drug-related overdose deaths.

- 2022: 28 total overdose deaths
- 2021: 25 total overdose deaths
- 2020: 19 total overdose deaths
- 2019: 17 total overdose deaths
- 2018: 18 total overdose deaths

Based on [911 call data](#) from the start of 2023 through July 31, 2023, 226 overdose/poisoning calls have already been placed this year. For annual comparison, in 2022, 385 overdose calls were made over the course of the year, 383 calls in 2021, and 282 calls in 2020. Overdoses/poisonings reported in these calls do not always result in death but do provide information about the volume of related calls.

Multiple factors affect the rate of overdose in our community, including the on-going impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased presence of [fentanyl](#) and [xylazine](#) in illicit street drugs, based on Medical Examiner reports. Fentanyl is a highly addictive synthetic opioid added to illicit street drugs to increase consumption and is highly associated with risk of overdose death. Xylazine (also known as “tranq” or “tranq dope”) is a non-opioid sedative or tranquilizer that is not approved for use in humans but is frequently found in illicit street drugs. Risk of overdose is increased when fentanyl and/or xylazine are mixed in with other substances, an issue that is increasingly found with the purchase of illicit street drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, crystal methamphetamine and illicitly manufactured pills, including benzodiazepines and other psychostimulants like Molly and MDMA.

Harmful side effects of fentanyl and xylazine include sedation, confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, urinary retention, pupillary constriction, and respiratory depression. Signs of overdose include stupor, changes in pupillary size (pinpoint size pupils), cold and clammy skin, cyanosis (blue discoloration of the skin), coma and respiratory failure leading to death.

Tompkins County Whole Health Commissioner Frank Kruppa stated, “We are advising the community about the risk of fentanyl in street drugs to promote harm reduction. Fentanyl and xylazine are extremely dangerous. If you are buying street drugs, please test for fentanyl and xylazine, carry Narcan and never

use alone. If you want support to reduce your use of street drugs, please reach out to any of our local substance use disorder programs.”

Overdose Prevention Resources

NYS DOH issued a [statewide pharmacy standing order](#) for Naloxone (Narcan), which is a medication that can be easily administered in the form of a nasal spray to block the effects of opioids. Providers, the general public, and anyone close to someone who is suffering with addiction are encouraged to obtain naloxone from a pharmacy or community agency. Individuals will need to have insurance to access this standing order at no cost in a pharmacy. Pharmacies will bill insurance through the [Naloxone Co-Payment Assistance Program \(N-CAP\)](#) to cover fees and co-payments.

If you do not have insurance, dial 2-1-1 (1-877-211-8667) to receive assistance. Narcan kits are available for free at [local community agencies](#) that provide free Narcan training to educate community members in its use to prevent an overdose from becoming a death. Schedule a Narcan training or request kits by contacting [Tompkins County Whole Health, Alcohol & Drug Council](#), [Cayuga Addiction Recovery Services](#), [REACH Medical](#) or the [Southern Tier AIDS Program](#).

TCWH Deputy Commissioner of Mental Health Harmony Ayers-Friedlander stated, “We implore everyone in our community to pick up a Narcan kit and become trained in its use. In its nasal spray form, Narcan is simple to use and effective. Having a Narcan kit and being prepared to use it may save someone’s life.”

[Fentanyl testing strips](#) and xylazine testing strips can identify the presence of these drugs. Both fentanyl and xylazine testing strips are available, free of cost, at a variety of locations, including Tompkins County Whole Health’s downtown office at 201 E. Green St. (Ithaca), at the Southern Tier AIDS Program, at REACH Medical, Alcohol and Drug Council, and at Cayuga Addiction Recovery Services.

Narcan and testing strips can also be ordered for free through NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports (NYS OASAS), delivered to your residence. Order online at: <https://oasas.ny.gov/harm-reduction>. To learn more about other available prevention services, visit: <https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/>

To protect yourself or those you care about, the following overdose prevention strategies are recommended:

- Never use alone
- Use fentanyl and xylazine testing strips as a precaution
- Carry Narcan and be trained in its use
- [Seek treatment and support](#)
- Create an [overdose prevention safety plan](#)
- Always dial 9-1-1 in the event of a medical emergency

Addiction and Mental Health Community Resources

Tompkins County Whole Health’s Mental Health Services provide individual and group therapy and programs for mental health and substance use support. Come during [Open Access hours](#). Mondays – Thursdays, 9am-2pm, to begin services as soon as you walk in our building at 201 East Green Street, Ithaca. Call 607-274-6200 to learn more.

Community partners also provide a wide variety of services for those in need of addiction support. Alcohol and Drug Council offers a variety of education programs, counseling services and treatment

options, including [Medication Assisted Treatment \(MAT\)](#). Cayuga Addiction Recovery Services offers men's residential rehabilitation and out-patient treatment services, as well as a specific Opioid Treatment Program and MAT. REACH Medical also provides a wide range of medical and behavioral health services, including MAT, available to anyone in the community, regardless of ability to pay. To find other available treatment programs throughout the state, use the [NYS Office of Addiction Services & Supports online directory](#).

Community-based [support groups](#) are available for individuals to help navigate your personal recovery, as well as for friends and families affected by their loved one's substance use. NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports hosts [HOPEline](#), a 24/7 helpline to call or text for support. Call 1-877-8-HOPENY (467369) or Text HOPENY (467369) for immediate assistance.

The [9-8-8 Lifeline](#) call service is also available, 24/7, to speak confidentially with mental health professionals about your concerns; dial 9-8-8 to connect with this support. Need help finding help? Dial 2-1-1 (1.877.211.8667) for supportive, local referrals and resource connections.

NYS OASAS also hosts the "[Project COPE](#)" website, which promotes overdose prevention and harm reduction education in New York State. The goal of this initiative is to empower people to learn how to prevent overdoses and save lives in their community.

Resources are readily available in Tompkins County. Learn more about local opioid statistics and additional resources online at: <https://tompkinscountyny.gov/health/opioids>.

Tompkins County Whole Health (formerly the Tompkins County Health Department): envisioning a future where every person in Tompkins County can achieve wellness. Find us online at TompkinsCountyNY.gov/health, and follow us on Facebook at Facebook.com/TompkinsWholeHealth and on Twitter at @TCWholeHealth. [Sign up](#) to receive Whole Health updates or other county announcements via email or text.

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