



New Hampshire School Nurses' Association

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NHSNA Position Statement Opioid Antagonist in the School Setting

SUMMARY

The New Hampshire School Nurses Association (NHSNA) supports the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN, 2020) that the safe and effective management of opioid related overdose in the school setting should be incorporated into the school emergency preparedness and response plan. When emergencies happen, including drug-related emergencies, managing these incidents at school in a timely manner is vital to positive outcomes. The registered professional school nurse (hereinafter referred to as school nurse) provides leadership in all phases of emergency preparedness and is an essential part of the school team responsible for developing emergency response procedures. School nurses, working within the policy of their local jurisdictions, should facilitate access to an opioid antagonist for the management of opioid-related overdose in the school setting, supporting students, staff and visitors in the event of an overdose. The NHSNA recognizes that substance misuse occurs across all populations and we advocate for any and all who may be in need of emergency treatment. Furthermore, prevention, as well as harm reduction measures should occur at all educational levels in our schools. (Whitehouse, 2023)

BACKGROUND

In 2022 there were 409 opioid-related overdoses in New Hampshire (NH). Of these overdoses, all but 54 were related to Fentanyl or a combination of Fentanyl and/or other drugs. The New Hampshire Youth Risk Behavior Survey (NH YRBS, 2019, 2021) indicated that in 2019 1.47% and in 2021, 1.4% of the students who answered the question, answered yes to having used heroin at least once in their life.

Due to the geographic nature of New Hampshire (NH), some schools do not have access to immediate Emergency Medical Service (EMS) response, as many departments are staffed by volunteers and not full time responders. In addition to slower response times in more rural areas of the state, EMS providers are facing staffing shortages that may impact delivery of care in a timely fashion.

Given the extent of the problem, in June 2015 NH House Bill 271 was put into law exempting from the provisions of the Controlled Drug Act (NH RSA 318-B) a healthcare professional or other person who prescribes, dispenses, distributes, or stores an opioid antagonist or who administers it to an individual suffering from an apparent opioid-related overdose. Today, opioid antagonists are available over the counter (FDA, 2023), and there are school systems in New Hampshire that currently stock an opioid antagonist in their emergency kits, and some schools have them strategically placed in the building near the Automated External Defibrillator (AED). (JEMS, 2023)

RATIONALE

Harm-reduction approaches to opioid overdoses include expanded access (NH HB 271) to naloxone--an opioid overdose antidote--which can prevent overdose deaths by reversing life threatening respiratory depression (FDA, n.d.). When administered quickly and effectively, an opioid antagonist has the potential to immediately restore breathing to the victim of an opioid overdose. While school nurses are uniquely positioned to know their population, and who might appear to be at a higher risk for substance misuse, having access to opioid antagonists allows for a rapid response for any person in danger.

The NHSNA, in conjunction with NASN, agrees that school nurses, at all levels in NH should be responsible for anticipating, preparing, and responding to a variety of emergencies (NASN, 2022). The school nurse is often the first health professional who responds to an emergency in the school setting possessing the education and knowledge to identify emergent situations.

The school nurse manages the medical emergency until relieved by emergency personnel, communicates the assessment and interventions to EMS, and initiates follow-up with a health care provider when applicable. The unique geography and rural nature of New Hampshire can often negatively impact and delay response times of first responders to many schools within the state. In addition, challenges with staffing models and overall recruitment and retention in both career and volunteer agencies cause further complications. These delays necessitates the immediate access by school nurses to the life-saving measures that naloxone can provide.

CONCLUSION

Opioid related overdose kills hundreds in New Hampshire every year (NH DHHS-2022). Many of these deaths are preventable with the timely use of an opioid antagonist as well as the quick summoning of EMS and the initiation of care. NH school nurses, as allowed by local administration and policy, are in the position to administer life-saving measures in the event of an opioid overdose. In addition, as an integral part of the interdisciplinary team, school nurses are also in the unique position to provide prevention awareness and support to students, family, faculty, and staff- a critical step in the on-going management of substance abuse and misuse.

REFERENCES

- NASN Position Statement 2020
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