



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 5, 2016

CONTACT: Amie M. Downs
412-350-3711 office
412-327-3700 cell
Amie.Downs@AlleghenyCounty.us

Melissa Wade
Health Department
412-578-8312 office
412-339-7995 cell
MWade@achd.net

Allegheny County Registers 246 Opioid Overdose Deaths in 2015
Health Department, Others Continue to Work to Abate and Address the Problem

PITTSBURGH – In Allegheny County, the most significant component of overdose deaths is due to opioids which include illegal drugs such as heroin, as well as prescription medications such as oxycodone, methadone and fentanyl. According to the Office of the Medical Examiner, there were 246 deaths in 2015 in Allegheny County, due primarily to opioids.

“The most widely-found opioids were heroin and different forms of fentanyl, and they are usually in various combinations,” said Dr. Karl Williams, the Allegheny County Medical Examiner. “In the 2015 cases, heroin was found in 209 cases, fentanyl in 99 and alpha-Methylfentanyl in 20 cases. There is no evidence that this epidemic is abating and efforts to address the problem are ongoing at the local, state and federal levels.”

In 2014, the total number of overdoses was 326 with heroin found in 157 of the total cases and fentanyl in 59. The increase in heroin-related deaths in Allegheny County began in 2010 when 50 cases were found with the drug. The increase in fentanyl is a newer phenomenon. There were eight deaths in which fentanyl was found in 2013, as opposed to 99 in 2015. In 2013, the fentanyl was almost exclusively from diverted pharmaceutical drugs, such as the fentanyl patch, whereas now its source appears to be illicit manufacturing.

The Allegheny County Health Department is continuing to track this epidemic utilizing data on emergency department visits for chief complaint of overdose and reports on the use of naloxone by Emergency Medical Service (EMS) providers. While the numbers are increasing year to year, at least for the emergency department visits, the numbers are leveling out.

“The opioid crisis has claimed far too many lives,” said Dr. Karen Hacker, Director of the Allegheny County Health Department. “We are and will continue to use multiples strategies to decrease addiction to and overdose from opioids in our county. I encourage those impacted by addiction to seek treatment and remind all of the availability of naloxone.”

Dr. Williams and Dr. Hacker continue to work with the Allegheny County Bureau of Drug & Alcohol Services; Allegheny County Emergency Services; Allegheny County Police; Pittsburgh Police; Pittsburgh Poison Center; and Prevention Point Pittsburgh to share information and implement evidence-based programming to address the issue.

The county's Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services provides a wide variety of substance abuse assessment, treatment and recovery services. Assistance is available by calling 412-350-3328 during regular business hours. Individuals who may need immediate detoxification should go to an emergency room. The Pittsburgh Poison Center also has specialists on call 24/7 to provide treatment recommendations, answer questions and provide information regarding opioids and heroin. The Center can be reached at 1-800-222-1222.

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an overdose that is caused by an opioid drug. When administered, the naloxone blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and restores breathing within two to eight minutes. It is not a narcotic, and is not addictive. In May of 2015, Dr. Hacker issued a countywide standing order for naloxone, or Narcan. The order applies to intranasal and automatic injection administration, which allows pharmacies to dispense take-home naloxone rescue kits without a prescription. The full list of participating pharmacies, with standing orders in place through Dr. Hacker's standing order, or that of PA Physician General Dr. Rachel Levine, can be found at www.achd.net/overdoseprevention/. Individuals experiencing difficulty purchasing naloxone, or pharmacies with questions about naloxone access, should contact the Health Department at 412-687-ACHD.

Naloxone is also available at Prevention Point Pittsburgh's clinic site which is held each Sunday from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. at 3441 Forbes Avenue in Oakland. The non-profit organization promotes and advocates for the reduction of harm associated with drug use. It also provides overdose prevention and response trainings with naloxone prescriptions. More information on its services can be found online at www.pppgh.org and on the organization's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/PreventionPoint.

###



KARL WILLIAMS, MD, MPH, MEDICAL EXAMINER
OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER
1520 PENN AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15222
PHONE (412) 350-4800 • FAX (412) 350-4899
WWW.ALLEGHENYCOUNTY.US

KAREN HACKER, MD, MPH, DIRECTOR
ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT – PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
542 FOURTH AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15219
PHONE (412) 687-ACHD • FAX (412) 578-8325 • WWW.ACHD.NET

