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Lamorinda schools prepped to handle potential overdose cases

By Sora O'Doherty



Faux fentanyl lethal dose Photo courtesy media gallery of the DEA

Shortly after 10 a.m. on Jan. 13 the staff at Acalanes High School responded quickly to a student medical emergency involving fentanyl, with the school nurse immediately administering naxolone (the generic form of Narcan, which is an antidote to the opioid drug) to the student. The student was then transported by emergency responders, who provided additional medical care. Acalanes High School Principal Eric Shawn sent a letter to to the families of Acalanes students expressing his gratitude for the immediate response of the school's administrative and medical team, and the rapid response of medical professionals who provided the necessary emergency care.

Superintendent John Nickerson of the Acalanes Union High School District said that the district has had three cases where fentanyl has been ingested by students during the last 12 months. Some of those incidents occurred at school, some outside of school.

According to Nickerson, AUHSD was one of the first districts in California to pass a board policy to allow Narcan on campus. Although authorized in 2017, the recent incident was the first time Narcan had been used in an AUHSD school. The superintendent added that the incident and the response of staff was very traumatic, even to the school nurse. AUHSD is planning more student education regarding fentanyl and Narcan, in addition to more staff training for teachers, nurses and school administrators. Nickerson noted that response training is significant because with opioid overdoses, minutes, and sometimes even seconds matter.

According to the Center for Disease Control, fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. It is a major contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses in the U.S. According to the Federal Drug Enforcement Agency, "Fentanyl is the single deadliest drug threat our nation has ever encountered," said Administrator Anne Milgram. "Fentanyl is everywhere. From large metropolitan areas to rural America, no community is safe from this poison. We must take every opportunity to spread the word to prevent fentanyl-related overdose death and poisonings from claiming scores of American lives every day." A potentially lethal dose of fentanyl is just 2 mg.

According to the CDC, an opioid overdose can cause a person's breathing to be dangerously slowed or stopped, causing brain damage or death. It's important to recognize the signs and act fast, even before emergency workers arrive. On the Narcan website, it is noted that while brain damage can begin after 4 minutes without breathing, and death can occur in another 4 to 6 minutes, it takes an average of 7 minutes for an ambulance to respond. The CDC also states that naloxone can be given safely to people of all ages, from infants to older adults, including adolescents or young adults who may have unintentionally taken an opioid.

According to the Office of California Governor, last year California seized enough fentanyl to potentially kill the entire population of North America - twice. California has received more than \$100 million as part of the national opioid settlement with multiple major pharmaceutical companies, and the state has been announcing new grants to tackle youth opioid use, including grants to schools.

In the California Legislature, AB 19, introduced by Assembly Member Joe Patterson states that each individual public school operated by a school district, county office of education, or charter school shall maintain at least two doses of naloxone hydrochloride or another opioid antagonist on its campus. This is already the practice of area high schools, and local TK-12 districts are also responding.

Orinda Union School District Superintendent Aida Glimme informed parents on Jan. 13 that the district had been notified by their high school partners that a student at Acalanes High School suffered from a fentanyl overdose. "Thanks to their preparation and quick reaction from their staff, the child was administered Narcan, an emergency treatment medication, and medical personnel responded to provide additional support." Glimme added, "Our hearts go out to the child and the family, as well as the staff and students present during this difficult time." Glimme continued, "While an incident like this may be unlikely in a TK-8 district, nonetheless we wanted to let you know that we have Narcan at our middle school and will soon be supplying our elementary schools with the emergency treatment medication. We have school staff trained in administration of Narcan in a case of overdose."

Lafayette School District Superintendent Brent Stephens informed parents that "although the Lafayette School District has not had an opioid-related incident in our schools, in August of last year, the District enrolled in a program offered by the California Department of Health Care Services to ensure that Narcan is available in our schools, and that all schools have staff trained in its use. The District received the doses just before winter break and our district nurse has been trained. We are currently in the process of training additional staff at each school site. By the first week in February, we will have trained staff at all five schools." He added, "Having Narcan in our school offices is much like having an EpiPen to counteract an allergic reaction - we view it as a necessary preparation for something we hope will never happen."

Moraga School District Superintendent Julie Parks also told The Lamorinda Weekly that "Moraga has already obtained Narcan for our schools. We are in the process of stockpiling more, but we have had this on campus since October. Our nurse has trained all administrative and office staff. She has created a training video for all staff that will be deployed this month." She added, "We are looking at our health curriculum and ways to develop material for students at Joaquin Moraga Middle School on the dangers of fentanyl." Also, MSD has sent several emails this year to parents and there is information on the District website under health and wellness.

Nickerson said the Lafayette Police Department is investigating the most recent case in an attempt to identify the source of the drug.

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