

DRUGS DON'T WORK IN NJ

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Are You Prepared to Address the Opioid Crisis in Your Workplace?



Powell Stevenson, left, a member of PDFNJ's advisory committee for more than 15 years, received the Drugs Don't Work in NJ Founder's Award from Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey Executive Director Angelo Valente.

The workplace is not immune to the opioid crisis that has gripped New Jersey. Managers and business owners are facing the challenges on a more frequent basis as both their employees and customers are impacted. This year's DDW Annual Seminar provided an overview of the scope of the opioid crisis by Assistant Special Agent In Charge Nicholas Kolen from the Drug Enforcement Administration, New Jersey Division. As reported in [The Press of Atlantic City](#), Kolen said it's difficult for an employer to know if an employee is misusing prescription drugs. But, you didn't have to hear ASAC Kolen's entire presentation to know that this issue is widespread. More and more media coverage has been focusing on the overdoses in the workplace, a bathroom at a convenience store, in a public library or a waiter overdosing in the bathroom of the restaurant where he was working.

There are also scenarios that are not in the news, but that every manager or business owner is aware of. One example that was recently discussed included a female employee in long-term recovery for opioid misuse who feels pain at work. She complains to a co-worker that she was not feeling well, and the co-worker offers the woman one of her prescription opioids. After taking the pill, the woman returned to abusing heroin and died a short time later.

Every workplace must become engaged in prevention, as well as knowing what to do if an employee or customer overdoses. The Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Morris is just one of the many agencies throughout New Jersey to offer free training on how to respond to an opioid overdose, and how to administer naloxone in the event of an opioid overdose. Taking these steps can save lives in your workplace.

The National Safety Council found that many employers had an "it can't happen here" attitude, with only 24 percent of the surveyed companies providing training or education to employees on opioid use and misuse.

- **Opioid users are involved in more work accidents and miss twice as many days of work as people without a substance use disorder.**

- **60 percent of worker compensation claims in New Jersey involved opioids.**
- **Nationally, the misuse of opioids has led to an increase in the number of claims and length of time on disability and has lowered rates of productivity, costing employers approximately \$16.3 billion.**

Understanding the issue, raising awareness among employees and having an overdose response plan is crucial, to save lives and protect your business. The Drugs Don't Work in New Jersey online toolkit is available for all members to access at DrugFreeNJ.Org/DDW and contains information on how to effectively update your Drug Free Work Place Policy to address the opioid crisis.

Below are some points and recommendations for all managers and business owners to be aware of to safeguard their workplace.

Possible Indicators of a Substance Use Problem in the Workplace

- Attendance problems – lateness, unplanned absences, use of sick days on Mondays, Fridays or after payday
- Performance issues – missing deadlines or quotas, careless work, failure to complete assignments
- Strained work relationships – being short-tempered, belligerent, argumentative with co-workers, customers or vendors
- Behavior issues – depression, irritability, lowered motivation, fatigue, itching, nodding off, nausea, confusion, anxiety attacks, euphoria (excessive or loud talking or laughing) and change in pupil size

From an employer's standpoint, two strategies need to be implemented. First, make a concerted effort to prevent misuse and abuse of prescription painkillers and other opioids. Secondly, ensure supervisors can identify and know what steps to take regarding opioid misuse, including an overdose in the workplace. Through the use of an employee assistance program (EAP) or other agency, guidelines need to be in place regarding treatment, return to duty, and ongoing support for recovery.

Providing education to employees and supervisory training are important strategies often overlooked. Education of employees is especially important now. Employers can play a pivotal role in the opioid crisis by implementing educational programs and specifically teaching employees about the potential for dependency on the opioids they were prescribed, as well as learning that sharing their prescriptions can be a dangerous and possibly fatal mistake.

Employees should provide education on:

- Addictive qualities prescription pain killers and the need for safe storage of these medications.
- Workplace guidelines, including expectations and prohibitions should they be using a prescription pain-killer that may have an effect on their work performance.
- Workplace policy should abuse of misuse of prescription drugs take place, including specific policy procedures that would take place if the policy is violated.
- Treatment available for a substance use disorder through an EAP or other agency, how requests for assistance will be handled, and note that the issue will be handled in a confidential manner. Address how appeals will be handled.

Additional information is available [here](#).

Educational programs on substance awareness should be done on an ongoing basis and often work better if they are part of a company's health and wellness program. Possible strategies include: education in company newsletters, fact sheets on availability of program assistance included with the company pay envelopes or placed in common areas (cafeteria or breakrooms) and signs posted in the workplace. Employers could also use social media to address the issue.

Supervisory Training Signs and Symptoms of a Substance Use Disorder

In an ideal world, good education programs would prevent all substance use problems from occurring in the workplace. However, even with a comprehensive program in place, employers may still encounter problems. Therefore, having supervisors well trained to address the issue is important. Employers should schedule a substance awareness training program for supervisors and managers at least once per year. The National Safety Council recommends the following:

Manager training should include examples of typical behavioral-and performance-related signs of impairment. The organization should also determine the threshold for reasonable cause to test employees for drug use, and those parameters must be consistent with legal and policy requirements. Again, safety is key. Employee communication needs to focus on the shared goal – ensuring that work can be done safely and effectively at all times.

A supervisor who has a reasonable suspicion that an employee may have a substance use issue needs to be documenting behaviors and problems and noting how job performance has been affected. Once observations have been documented, one should meet with another supervisor or boss to discuss appropriate ways to move forward, including working with an EAP counselor. If testing for "reasonable suspicion" is part of the company policy, a determination needs to be made if the current behavior falls within company guidelines. When, it comes time to speak with an employee, be respectful, be constructive, and maintain a non-judgmental attitude. This might help to keep lines of communication open. The supervisor's job is to address job performance, not to diagnose a substance use disorder.

Signs and Symptoms & How to Handle an Overdose

Employers must understand that helping those with a substance use disorder and those at risk of developing a disorder is an urgent matter. Employers now need to be prepared to handle an opioid overdose in the workplace. For information on signs and symptoms of an overdose, click [here](#).

How to Respond to an Overdose

- Call the person's name to see if he or she responds.
- If this does not work, vigorously grind knuckle into sternum (the breastbone in the middle of chest) or rub knuckle on the person's upper lip.
- If the person responds, assess whether he or she can maintain responsiveness and breathing.
- If the person does not respond, call 911 immediately. Identify your address and location. Follow the dispatcher's instructions.
- If there is a person trained to do so, administer naloxone.

An opioid overdose death can be prevented when naloxone is administered in a timely manner. As a narcotic antagonist, naloxone displaces opiates from receptor sites in the brain and reverses respiratory depression.

General Recommendations for Employees Prescribed Opioids from the National Safety Council and PDFNJ

- Partner with your prescription and health plan providers to help gate-keep, monitor, and intervene on the use of prescription drugs.

- Re-evaluate policy and testing for prescription drugs. Require employees to report their use of prescription drugs that can cause drowsiness. Ensure that employee drug testing includes the most commonly prescribed opioid painkiller drugs.
- Invest in management and employee education.
- Review any revisions in policy with your attorney.
- Have an overdose response plan.

Treatment, Return to Duty and Recovery

Part of a comprehensive policy regarding substance abuse disorder includes having access to quality treatment programs, return to duty guidelines and assistance in long term recovery. PDFNJ recommends employers work with a qualified EAP to do this. If the company does not have an EAP, connecting with local agencies (treatment facilities, counseling and support groups) is essential. As with those suffering from other chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease, millions of Americans with a substance use disorder are in recovery and are hardworking, reliable employees. A comprehensive policy not only addresses the short-term requirements for employees initiating their return to duty and their first stage in the recovery process, employers also need to recognize the recovering individual needs involving long-term support systems that are essential to a healthy and productive lifestyle. When their employer plays a positive role in providing assistance, employees are often the most loyal employees in the company.

Have an overdose action plan?

About the

Authors

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Readers of this update can obtain additional information from the following sources that were used in the update.

The National Safety Council – “The Proactive Role Employers Can Take: Opioids in the Workplace” www.nsc.org. Included in the article is a sample policy addressing prescription and over the counter medications.

SAMHSA – Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit: <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA16-4742/SMA16-4742.pdf>

US News & World Report “Addiction in the Workplace: Tips for Employers” <https://health.usnews.com/health-news/patient-advice/articles/2016-08-04/addiction-in-the-workplace-tips-for-employers>

For Treatment Information, call 1-844-Reach NJ or visit www.reachnj.gov.

PDFNJ Resources

The PDFNJ Drug-Free Workplace Online Toolkit: Revised this year and available online for members at www.drugfreenj.org. If you are a member and do not have the current password to access the toolkit, please contact us at coordinator@drugfreenj.org or call 973 467-2100.

Supervisory Training: Members of *Drugs Don't Work in NJ!* may schedule a FREE supervisory training program provided by PDFNJ.

Parent Education Presentation: Members are encouraged to schedule the "15 Minute Child Break" presentation, a one-hour multimedia program for parents and adult-caregivers that provides up-to-date information on drug use among children, as well as identifying risk factors, protective factors and communication strategies. The very same characteristics needed by a parent to address this issue coincide with attitudes and behaviors expected in the workplace. Additionally, research by the Kaiser Family Foundation noted that 53 percent of the money spent on the abuse of opioids in larger employer plans is being used for enrollees' dependent children. This program can be an important preventive and cost-saving measure.

Posters and Flyers: Employers may create and display posters or flyers addressing the opioid crisis. Access to the 2018 PDFNJ media campaign can be accessed <http://drugfreenj.org/opioidtoolkit/>.

For assistance from PDFNJ or to schedule a training program, a child break presentation or if you are seeking technical please contact Dorothy Carnivale, at coordinator@drugfreenj.org or 973-467-2100

Notice: Quarterly Updates reflect the opinion of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey (PDFNJ). This information should not be construed as legal advice. PDFNJ recommends you consult your attorney before making any legal decisions.

Have an Overdose Action Plan?

BE A SUPERHERO

CALL 911

- 1 Call 911 and report observable behavior
- 2 Administer rescue breathing
- 3 Administer naloxone
- 4 Stay with the person until professional help arrives

Be a Superhero ... Save a Life with Naloxone

Visit CaresNJ.org for more information.

