

The Opioid Crisis,

What You Need to Know

By Joy Miller, Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent

With no shortage of news coverage about the opioid crisis affecting people from every socio-economic level in communities large and small across the country, it's helpful to step back and take a look at exactly what opioids are, the risks, and how to respond whether they're a problem in your home or your community.

Opioids are a class of drugs that include powerful prescription pain relievers, including oxycodone, codeine, morphine, and fentanyl, and the illegal drug heroin. The prescription drugs can be an important part of treatment and are commonly prescribed by doctors for pain. They also carry the significant risk for addiction and overdose because of the euphoria they create and the tolerance that occurs after repetitive dosing.

Many people are prescribed these medications by a doctor for legitimate reasons – often for pain management – but anyone who takes a prescription opioid for an extended period of time or does not take it as prescribed is at risk for misuse and abuse.

What can you do to help make a change? Start by practicing safe storage of your medications. Treat opioid medication like you would a firearm by storing them in a safe, secure location. Never leave medications on a counter, nightstand, or other accessible locations. Also, dispose of your medications safely such as at a drug take-back event. You can also utilize medication disposal bags or mix the medication with an undesirable substance, seal it in a bag, and dispose of it in your household trash. Remember to mark out labels and safely dispose of your medication bottles so you don't become a target for break-ins.

Another way to assist is knowing how to respond in an emergency. Indications of an overdose include shallow breathing, gasping or choking for air, pale skin, blue lips or fingertips, small-pinpoint pupils, and unconsciousness. If you suspect someone is overdosing, attempt to keep the person awake, call 911, and administer naloxone if available.

Lastly, seek help if you are addicted. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offers online and over the phone assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Go to findtreatment.samhsa.gov or call 1-800-662-4357. This hotline is a confidential, free source of information for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. They will also provide referrals to local treatment facilities and community-based organizations.

Kansas is far from being one of the states that has been hardest hit by the opioid epidemic, it is crucial that we take steps to bring awareness and education on the crisis before it gets worse. You can take a proactive role and fight against the opioid crisis.

To learn more, a fact sheet, "[The Opioid Crisis: What You Need to Know](#)," developed by Kansas State University assistant professor Erin Yelland is available in the Southwind Extension offices and on our website. A 3 panel display will soon be available for organizations and businesses to check out to help further awareness and education.

For additional information, contact the Southwind Extension District, Fort Scott office 620-223-3720. Our website is <http://www.southwind.ksu.edu> or follow us on Facebook: Southwind Extension District.