



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Based on information gathered from numerous agencies and organizations nationwide, including law enforcement, emergency medical services, hospitals and others, every state in the U.S. has reported an increase in overdose deaths since the COVID pandemic began. COVID has indeed made America's drug overdose epidemic much worse.

The drugs that are often causing overdose deaths are fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine, but prescription drug and heroin overdoses also remain extremely high.

Even though doctors have reduced the number of opioid prescriptions written in every state for the past ten years in a row, opioid overdose deaths have continued to increase. There has been almost a 45% decrease in opioid drug prescriptions dispensed since 2011 but overdose deaths have climbed to more than 93,000 in early 2021.

Accidental Overdose, or Suicide?

Medical professionals are beginning to ask what percentage of these overdose deaths are accidental, and how many might be hidden suicides. We do know that from 1999-2014 the rate of opioid-related suicide deaths doubled, and it is surmised that the stress caused by the pandemic has led to an increase in intentional overdoses over the past two years.

A study published in the Recovery Research Institute shed some light on the issue. Researchers found that there were some differences in self-inflicted drug overdose deaths and unintentional drug overdose deaths. The study reported that self-inflicted overdoses were more likely to involve anti-depressants as a contributing cause of

death and more likely to involve a prescription dispensed in the weeks prior to death, suggesting potential contact with the health care system in the weeks/months leading up to death. This fact highlights for medical practitioners the need for better patient access to counseling and psychosocial support along with medical treatment.

Preventing Overdose Deaths

There are actions we all can take to help prevent intentional and unintentional overdose deaths. It begins with treating those who are suffering from chronic emotional and physical pain with compassion and dignity without dismissing their need for mental help and/or medical management of their therapy. But more than just showing concern and understanding, we have to take into consideration the realities, experiences, and perspectives of those who are at risk of overdose.

We also must acknowledge health disparities in all aspects of healthcare as a form of stigma—racial and other biases, language differences, gender, economic disparities, and other factors create barriers to care for chronic pain, substance use disorder, and mental illness.

Nationwide, we have to work to expand access to evidence-based treatment to reduce barriers to medications to treat substance use disorders including medications to treat opioid use disorder and we should pass new laws to ensure that money from opioid-related lawsuits is used to fund public health treatment and prevention efforts.

On a personal level, we should never hesitate to call 911 in the event of an overdose. 911 Good Samaritan laws vary across the U.S. but each one is written with the goal of reducing barriers to

calling 911 in the event of an overdose. This type of legislation can provide overdose victims and/or overdose bystanders with limited immunity from drug-related criminal charges and other criminal or judicial consequences that may otherwise result from calling first responders to the scene.

But the first and most important step to take in saving the life of a person who is overdosing is to get them breathing again. This is why CPR training is so valuable. If you are trained and comfortable doing so, you can do rescue breathing and/or chest compressions until they wake up. Rescue breathing, even with a breathing mask, and chest compressions may carry a risk for COVID-19 transmission, however, these techniques when correctly done can save lives, particularly if naloxone is not available.

The following suicide prevention information is provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities:

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities announces the launch of a new website, Prevent Suicide GA. The website promotes awareness, provides information, and offers resources for the prevention of suicide in Georgia.

The website includes:

- Information about suicide
- Initiatives of the Suicide Prevention Program
- Suicide Prevention events in Georgia
- Prevention materials published by the Suicide Prevention Program
- Ways communities can work together to prevent suicide
- A Find Help page to help access mental health, addiction, and crisis resources

At Prevent Suicide GA, DBHDD invites visitors to, "Imagine a future without suicide." What could life be like if a child never lost a parent to suicide? How would the world be different if no wife or husband knew the pain of suicide loss? How many tomorrows could we save if people could get help to live full and happy lives?

No suicides. That is a big goal, for sure, and we may not always hit 100%. However, we can always strive to meet it in the way we care for others. We can do it by building communities where people feel comfortable talking about suicide. We can create support systems where people get the care they need. We can also reach the goal by making resources that support long-term recovery available to everyone.

We hope Prevent Suicide GA will be a tool to help you reach this goal. Please visit and share. Use it to promote awareness. Think about how you can encourage open and honest conversations with it. Offer resources from it to provide meaningful support to those who need it most. Most of all, join us in imagining a future without suicide.

Imagine a future without suicide.
<https://preventsuicidega.org/>

If you experience any thoughts about suicide, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255**.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact the Suicide Prevention Director, Rachael Holloman, at:
rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255).