

October 18, 2022

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

Empowering Schools and Youth to Respond to the Drug Overdose Epidemic

Los Angeles County is experiencing the worst overdose epidemic in local history, and the overdose rate for youth has more than doubled since 2020. Sadly, the County has experienced a series of tragic overdoses, and in the past 12 months there have been at least 12 reported overdoses of youth who had taken illicit substances that contained fentanyl. On September 13, 2022, a 15-year-old student at Bernstein High School after ingesting a counterfeit pill containing fentanyl.

Fentanyl is a highly potent, synthetic opioid that is odorless, colorless, 50 times stronger than heroin, and can stop someone from breathing within minutes of ingesting it. It is often mixed with illicit substances, such as MDMA, cocaine, methamphetamine, and pressed into counterfeit pills such as Xanax, Oxycontin, Percocet, and Vicodin. Youth in particular have been targeted with “rainbow fentanyl,” which is sold in a variety of bright colors, shapes, and sizes. Fentanyl has become the leading cause for increases in overdose deaths in Los Angeles County, mirroring the national context with over 75% of adolescent overdoses involving fentanyl.

Los Angeles County, especially through the Department of Public Health Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (DPH-SAPC), has supported and is prepared to continue supporting schools with a variety of resources. DPH-SAPC promotes awareness of and education about the dangers of fentanyl through a number of activities, including providing online trainings for teachers

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and staff, partnering with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) to provide technical assistance to schools and bring resources to campuses, working with Student Ambassador Programs to train students and parents on best practices to address illicit substance use, and providing treatment for students using substances through the RecoverLA website.

Additionally, the County has supported interested schools in acquiring a supply of on-campus naloxone. Naloxone is a life-saving medication that reverses an opioid overdose within minutes. It is administered as an intranasal spray when someone is suspected of experiencing an opioid overdose and exhibits symptoms. These include decreased or stopped breathing, slow heartbeat, pinpoint pupils, bluish lips and fingernails, and cold skin. Naloxone is a safe, effective, non-addictive medication that only reverses opioid overdoses, is associated with minimal side effects, and can be safely administered to youth with minimal training.

There are multiple programs available to schools and school districts to acquire a supply of on-campus naloxone. The Direct Relief program, which is currently providing free naloxone for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), can provide a supply of free doses, with additional supplies available at a discounted price. In addition, the statewide Naloxone Distribution Project (NDP) also provides free doses upon request. These programs allow schools to offer a supply of naloxone on campus, which can provide students, teachers, and staff with access to this lifesaving medication to utilize if anyone, including youth, experiences an overdose on campus. DPH-SAPC is available to provide technical assistance to schools interested in learning more

and acquiring a supply for their campus.

Given the increased incidence of youth overdose, it is critical that schools, school districts, community-based organizations, students, teachers, school staff, parents, and caregivers are aware of the many resources available to them through the County and the State.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Health's Substance Abuse and Prevention Control, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Education and Department of Mental Health, to:

1. Develop an accessible toolkit in multiple languages with SAPC resources available for students, teachers, school staff, and parents to help provide education to prevent overdoses;
2. Proactively reach out to school districts to raise awareness of the resources available, including opportunities to acquire supplies of naloxone for interested school campuses;
3. Have the Department of Public Health work with the Youth Advisory Council and LACOE and DPH Student Ambassadors to train and provide peer support and outreach to students;
4. Utilize the Community Schools Initiative to incorporate substance use prevention and treatment materials into community resources;
5. Raise awareness of overdose risks associated with youth, utilizing traditional and social media, as well as engaging with ethnic and local media for culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach;
6. Conduct extensive public outreach, including utilizing promotoras and community health workers, as well as holding public town halls and forums both in-person and virtually in the appropriate languages, to further raise awareness of the dangers of fentanyl and other drugs; and
7. Report back within 60 days on the results of these efforts.

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