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Media Contact:
Jenny Johnson

Violence and Injury Prevention Program
(o) 801-538-9416 (m) 801-298-1569

News Release

New Weapon in War Against Rx Drug Overdoses *Downtown Ogden has 3rd Highest Rate in Utah*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Every month, 21 Utah adults die as a result of prescription pain medications. At third highest in the state, Downtown Ogden sees 29.6 deaths per 100,000 population. To combat the rising number of prescription pain medication overdoses in the Weber-Morgan area, officials from the Utah Department of Health (UDOH), Weber Human Services (WHS), and the Weber-Morgan Health Department (WMHD) have released a new toolkit to help community leaders and citizens prevent these tragedies.

“Over the past decade, prescription opioids have been responsible for more drug deaths in Utah than all other drug categories, including heroin and cocaine combined,” said Anna Fondario, UDOH epidemiologist. “This is a very real epidemic, and it warrants a strong public health response. If we work together, we have the power to save lives.”

The toolkit was specifically designed to meet the needs of the Downtown Ogden area. In addition to local and national data, the kit includes information on: effective state policies; signs and symptoms of abuse; prevention tips for community leaders, parents, schools, health care providers, and law enforcement; recommendations for the safe use, storage, and disposal of medications; how to work with the media; and a list of Ogden-area resources such as locations of permanent drop-off sites and substance abuse treatment centers.

Another critical feature is a wallet-sized card that explains what to do in case of an overdose and how to administer naloxone, a lifesaving rescue medication that can immediately reverse opioid overdoses.

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“We look forward to using and sharing this toolkit,” said Brian Bennion, Executive Director, WMHD. “It will be a great resource as we look for ways to tackle the epidemic of opioid-related abuse and deaths in our community.”

Additional UDOH data show:

- Utah ranks 5th in the nation for drug poisoning deaths; 49 Utahns die as a result of drug poisoning each month (1 death every 15 hours), and 75% of the deaths involve opioids such as oxycodone, methadone, and hydrocodone.
- 24.5% of Utahns reported using some type of prescribed opioid during the previous year. (Source: 2008 UDOH Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System)
- 2.6% of students in grades 8, 10, and 12 reported that they had used prescription drugs in the past 30 days that were not prescribed to them by a doctor. (Source: 2013 UDOH Youth Risk Behavior Survey)
- From 2009-2012, the top five circumstances observed in prescription pain medication deaths in Utah were substance abuse problem (73.1%), physical health problem (67.7%), current mental health problem (65.5%), alcohol dependence/problem (19.4%), and history of suicide attempts (12.7%).

“We continue to see a rise in both the number of individuals entering treatment for prescription drug abuse and the severity of the problems presented by these individuals. It impacts nearly every aspect of their lives. We believe this toolkit can help slow or even reverse these troubling trends,” said Darin Carver, spokesperson for WHS.

The National Take Back Initiative is a nationwide event sponsored by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to encourage people to properly dispose of leftover medications. The UDOH, WHS, and WMHD encourage anyone with leftover prescription drugs to take them to one of the Take Back events throughout the state on Saturday, September 27 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. A list of disposal locations can be found at <http://goo.gl/bEVKW>.

For information on the safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription pain medications, visit www.useonlyasdirected.org. To download the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Toolkit visit <http://health.utah.gov/vipp>.

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