

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Human Resources

Opioid Exposure/Overdose Prevention Policy

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That Policy 7.31 be approved as presented in Attachment No.1 to Report No. HR 2023-01 entitled “Opioid Exposure/Overdose Prevention”, effective January 11, 2023.**

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of this report is to present the proposed Opioid Exposure/Overdose Prevention Policy (Attachment No.1), which outlines the commitment Oxford County is making to enhance its current occupational health and safety program by making it more comprehensive with the inclusion of an opioid exposure/overdose prevention policy and procedures.
- Provides information and guidance to Oxford County staff who, during the course of their work duties could discover suspected opioids and/or are at risk of accidental exposure and the appropriate emergency response if an exposure/overdose were to occur.
- Identifies those Oxford County locations where the potential risk of opioid exposure has been identified and where naloxone kits shall be maintained.

Financial Impact







The proposed policy establishes a commitment by Oxford County to raise awareness of the risks associated with opioid exposure and to mitigate the potential for death and serious injury in the workplace. The only expected cost as a result of this initiative would be minimal and relate to future staff time for training. It is expected that naloxone kits and the training provided on how to use the kits will be available free from Southwestern Public Health. Where funding for kits is not available or ceases to be available for free it is anticipated that costs can be covered under existing first aid supply budget lines with minimal impact.

Communications

Upon approval of this policy, Human Resources will work with Strategic Communication and Engagement to develop an effective communication strategy so that all employees are aware of the policy and the potential risks of opioid exposure and provide the opportunity to learn how to respond to an exposure/overdose and administer naloxone properly. Oxford County Connections and the 2023 Oxford Grows staff development program will be the primary method for staff communication and education.

The policy identifies those workplace locations where naloxone kits shall be maintained due to risk of potential opioid exposure. Human Resources will continue to re-evaluate with County departments to identify locations where naloxone kits may be required in future and ensure staff are adequately trained to use those kits.

Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

					
<i>WORKS WELL TOGETHER</i>	<i>WELL CONNECTED</i>	<i>SHAPES THE FUTURE</i>	<i>INFORMS & ENGAGES</i>	<i>PERFORMS & DELIVERS</i>	<i>POSITIVE IMPACT</i>
1.ii.		3.iii.			6.i.

DISCUSSION

Background

Illegal drugs and problematic substance use is not a new problem, however, the opioid crisis has brought to light the devastating effects opioids are having on individuals, families and communities across Canada. Each year thousands of individuals lose their lives to what is primarily accidental overdoses in Canada. The lost lives make the opioid crisis a leading public health and safety concern that can also impact the workplace and worker safety.

More than 2,800 people died from opioid-related causes in Ontario in 2021¹ and that number is increasing. Workers in the construction industry make up 30% of employed opioid victims, by far the most heavily impacted industry although many workplace sectors are seeing increased opioid usage and incidents most often involving recreational drugs laced with deadly opioids such as fentanyl and carfentanil.²

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on the trajectory of the opioid crisis. Although a significant public health issue prior to the pandemic, the pandemic response that put in place public health restrictions to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 resulted in reduced service levels for health and social services such as pharmacies, outpatient clinics, harm reduction sites and other services providing care to people using drugs. These measures, although well intended, undoubtedly lead to some unintended harms for high-risk populations including increased risk of drug-related overdose and death.³

¹ Public Health Ontario, Interactive Opioid Tool - Opioid-related morbidity and mortality in Ontario, <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/substance-use/interactive-opioid-tool> (Accessed September 16, 2022)

² Public Health Ontario, Lives Lost to Opioid Toxicity among Ontarians Who Worked in the Construction Industry, https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/O/2022/opioid-toxicity-ontario-construction-lives-lost-report.pdf?sc_lang=en (Accessed September 16, 2022)

³ Public Health Ontario, Preliminary Patterns in Circumstances Surrounding Opioid-Related Deaths in Ontario during the COVID-19 Pandemic, https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/O/2020/opioid-mortality-covid-surveillance-report.pdf?sc_lang=en (Accessed September 16, 2022)

Oxford County delivers numerous services to the public including high-risk populations who are experiencing health issues, unemployment, addiction and homelessness. Employees working in Human Services, Housing, Oxford County Library, and Public Works have routine interactions with this clientele and/or enter private residences of opioid users. The discovery of suspected drugs and/or a victim of an opioid overdose has occurred in the past and continues to be an increasing possibility. In addition, Paramedic Services are on the front line of the opioid crisis and are dispatched daily to respond to 911 calls regarding opioid exposures and overdoses.

Comments

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a medication that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose and allow time for medical help to arrive. Requiring businesses in high-risk settings to have naloxone kits on hand will help reduce the stigma around opioid abuse, raise awareness about the risks of accidental overdose, and potentially save numerous lives every year. The Ontario government is working to develop a program that distributes free naloxone kits and training to employers. In the meantime, free kits are available at many pharmacies or can be obtained by accessing the following link – [Where to get a free naloxone kit on Ontario.ca](#) In addition to being supplied kits for free for workplace use, Oxford County is exploring the opportunity to be a naloxone distribution partner in cooperation with Southwestern Public Health meaning kits will also be available for free to the public from select Oxford County facilities.

Regulatory Requirements for Workplace Naloxone Kits

On April 11, 2022, Bill 88 (**Working for Workers Act, 2022**) received Royal Assent mandating naloxone kits in high-risk workplaces due to the increased risk of opioid exposure in Ontario workplaces. These amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) require workplaces that are at risk of a worker overdose to have naloxone kits. The legislation also introduces the highest fines in Canada for companies that fail to follow workplace health and safety laws. The increased fines would reinforce the importance of putting worker safety first and further penalize those that treat injuries as the cost of doing business. Businesses that do not provide a safe work environment that leads to a worker being severely injured or dying on the job could face fines of up to \$1.5 million under the OSHA if convicted. Charges for other workplace parties are also rising to up to \$500,000 per offence.

Opioid Exposure/Overdose Prevention Policy

The proposed policy is outlined in Attachment No. 1, and outlines our commitment to addressing opioid hazards to prevent accidental exposures and overdoses to County staff and members of the public visiting County facilities. A preventative approach to addressing opioid hazards in the workplace is vital to achieving a comprehensive occupational health and safety program. The proposed policy demonstrates the employer's continued commitment to enhancing its occupational health and safety program and ensuring healthy and safe workplaces.

The primary objectives for the Opioid Exposure/Overdose Prevention Policy include:

- Raising awareness of the hazards of opioid exposure and use;
- Providing information and specific instructions to staff on how to safely manage suspected opioids that are found within the workplace;
- Providing emergency response procedures for suspected opioid exposures/overdoses; and,
- Ensuring County workplaces where the risk of opioid exposure is identified are provided with life saving naloxone kits and that staff in those workplaces are properly trained to use them.

Conclusions

Oxford County recognizes the importance of having a comprehensive occupational health and safety program with the inclusion of an opioid exposure/overdose prevention component. The risk mitigation associated with potential opioid exposure is vitally important to ensuring Oxford County staff and members of the public are safe while also avoiding non-compliance actions and potential litigation. The proposed policy outlines Oxford County's commitment to addressing the issue of opioid exposure/overdose within the workplace.

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Departmental Approval:

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Approved for submission:

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Interim Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 Opioid Exposure/Overdoes Policy, January 11, 2023