



Chicago Department
of Public Health

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**Chicago Public Library and Chicago Department of Public Health
Announce Narcan Distribution at Libraries**

*The initiative will launch in 14 libraries across the city in mid-January
and expand to 27 total branches later in 2022*

CHICAGO - Chicago Public Library (CPL) and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) today announced a new program that will offer the overdose reversal medication Narcan at select CPL branches. By increasing access to this harm reduction tool, the program aims to prevent opioid-related overdose deaths in areas of the city most acutely affected by overdose.

Narcan, the FDA-approved nasal spray form of naloxone, is a crucial tool in the public health response to the opioid crisis. Narcan does not require medical training to administer and has no harmful effects if given to someone who is not experiencing an overdose. Narcan distribution programs have been shown to decrease opioid-related overdose fatalities nationwide.

“More than 75% of people who die from opioid overdose, do so here in Illinois before an emergency medical team makes it to the scene,” said Dr. Wilnise Jasmin, CDPH Medical Director of Behavioral Health. “People from all walks of life may misuse drugs, and potent synthetic opioids such as fentanyl are increasingly being added to all substances. The presence of these powerful opioids increases one’s risk of experiencing an overdose. It is often bystanders who can intervene quickly and by having Narcan widely available in public spaces, we can prevent persons from dying from an opioid overdose and buy more time for emergency medical personnel to arrive. The goal of harm reduction is to keep people alive and provide them with a chance to enter recovery.”

CDPH and CPL are launching this program at a particularly important moment: in 2020, 1,303 people died of an opioid-related overdose in Chicago, an increase of 52% over 2019 and the highest number ever recorded in the city’s history. Eighty-six percent (86%) of these deaths involved fentanyl, an extremely potent opioid that increases the risk of overdose. While the

increase in overdoses in 2020 partially reflects pandemic conditions that make it more challenging for people to access care while exacerbating social isolation and mental health stressors, it is important to note that opioid-related overdoses were increasing at the end of 2019, before the onset of the pandemic.

Public libraries across the United States have responded to the opioid crisis by providing free Narcan to patrons. Libraries offer a key environment for this harm reduction intervention as they are a safe and trusted location in the community and a space where particularly vulnerable populations come for a host of services. In Chicago, public libraries are also located at the heart of many of the neighborhoods most impacted by opioid overdose. Making Narcan available at these locations provides a targeted, community-centered intervention to address opioid overdose and equips CPL staff with the training and appropriate tools to best serve their patrons.

“Librarians provide critical resources to some of our city’s most vulnerable residents on a daily basis and we are honored to partner with them to increase access to this life saving medication in response to the ongoing overdose epidemic,” said Matt Richards, CDPH Deputy Commissioner of Behavioral Health. “We hope that this collaboration will inform future partnerships between CDPH and CPL as we consider new and innovative ways to integrate mental health and recovery resources into Chicago’s libraries.”

CDPH-provided Narcan will be available in wall-mounted boxes at the initial 14 library branches starting in mid-January. Patrons will not need to provide any information to access the Narcan, and may take as many kits as they would like. CDPH has provided training to library staff at participating branches on Narcan administration and distribution, and will continue to provide support to CPL as this initiative expands. The initial 14 branches were chosen based on a geographic analysis of opioid-related overdoses conducted by CDPH, and include: Austin, Chicago Bee, Coleman, Hall, King, Legler, Manning, North Austin, R.M. Daley, South Shore, West Chicago Ave, West Englewood, West Town, and Whitney Young.

“We are proud to partner with CDPH to improve the lives of Chicagoans and strengthen the communities we serve. As we continue to thoughtfully examine the ways our libraries support the neighborhoods we are in, this partnership to offer Narcan at library branches is a natural fit,” said Chicago Public Library Deputy Commissioner Maggie Clemons. “We have libraries located in every neighborhood, safe and trusted community anchors that serve all Chicagoans and help each neighborhood discover its potential. We look forward to an ongoing relationship with CDPH to enhance additional health resources in our libraries.”

CDPH and CPL will track the amount of Narcan distributed at the participating branches and use this information to inform further public health initiatives aimed at curbing overdoses and linking individuals to treatment.

CDPH has received funding from the CDC's Overdose Data to Action grant to develop innovative data-driven approaches to overdose prevention. This Narcan initiative with CPL is one example

of leveraging data to integrate overdose prevention resources into the communities and locations where they are most needed. CDPH is also working with CPL to facilitate connections between community mental health providers and libraries to assist patrons experiencing unmet mental health needs.

Resources

- If you or a loved one is struggling with a substance use disorder and would like help, call the Illinois Helpline at 833-234-6343 or visit <https://helplineil.org/app/home>
- To request fentanyl test kits for yourself or your organization, email osu.cdph@cityofchicago.org
- Register as a Drug Overdose Prevention Program and receive free Narcan for distribution from the Illinois Department of Public Health: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=58142>
- CDPH 2020 Opioid Brief: https://www.chicagohan.org/alert-detail/-/alert-details/46669681?prp_categoryId=440394
- CDPH Mid-Year 2021 Opioid Report: https://www.chicagohan.org/alert-detail/-/alert-details/46667479?prp_categoryId=440394

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