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## **Heroin help: Narcan now available without prescription**

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For family and friends of heroin addicts, there is a constant fear of finding the person they love dead of an overdose. A series of initiatives are offering hope though prescription-free access to a drug used to combat opiate overdose.

Wisconsin is among several states that have passed legislation making it easier to access the overdose reversal medicine, naloxone, which is also known by the brand name Narcan. Major pharmacy chains have responded by beginning to offer the drug without a prescription at their stores.

CVS began offering the drug prescription-free at its Wisconsin pharmacies in late 2015. Walgreens has done the same in several other states, and will do so in Wisconsin later this year.

The drug, when given to someone who is unconscious and not breathing after an opiate overdose, can quickly restore respiration and bring the person back.

“Naloxone is a safe and effective antidote to opioid overdoses and by providing access to this medication in our pharmacies without a prescription in more states, we can help save lives,” said Tom Davis, vice president of pharmacy professional practices for CVS in a formal statement.

A spokesman for the chain said that naloxone is available for purchase at its Kenosha pharmacies, sold either as a nasal spray or as an intramuscular injection. She said no data was available on local sales.

Heroin addiction has skyrocketed in the last decade, the problem tied to growing problems with prescription pain killer addiction. The number of opiate overdose deaths has increased nationally by 200 percent since 2000, with

28,647 deaths in 2014 attributed to opiates, including heroin.

In Kenosha County, 40 people died of accidental overdoses in Kenosha County, nearly twice the number who died in motor vehicle crashes. Deaths from heroin use here increased by 171 percent from 2011 to 2012, and have remained high since that year.

Paramedics from the Kenosha Fire Department regularly administer naloxone.

The drug has also been available for more than a decade through the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin office in Kenosha, 1212 57th St.

As part of its mission, the AIDS Resource Center works with drug addicts through a needle exchange program. They began offering free naloxone, along with training, statewide in 2005.

Scott Stokes, director of prevention services at the AIDS Resource Center, said he was pleased to see pharmacies begin offering the drug.

“I think the more access the better. Whatever way people are comfortable getting the naloxone is going to be a good thing,” Stokes said. “A lot of family members are just looking for something they can do to help. At least if they are walking into a situation where a family member has overdosed and is unconscious they can do something. The quicker they can get naloxone on board the better.”

The AIDS Resource Center initially offered naloxone and training only to drug users. Two years ago they also began training “significant others” of users.

“Last year we trained more than 2,000 individuals statewide,” he said. “The demand never ends and we can’t seem to keep enough stock on hand to meet the demand.”

Stokes believes that it will be family members and loved-ones of users who purchase the drug from pharmacies. “We know that most drug users are not going to go to the pharmacy and buy it. They will take care of their addiction first, and if it is between spending money on their addiction or on naloxome, 99 percent of the time it’s going to be on their addiction,” he said.

The AIDS Resource Center gives the drug away free after training, giving addicts three doses, family members two doses.

Stokes said while there has been no slowdown in addiction, he is hopeful that changes in prescription procedures for pain killers and community education will make a difference. “I think we are making some good progress in preventing the next generation of opiate users,” he said.

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