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NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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For Immediate Release:
Nov. 4, 2011

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Department of Health Provides Services to Prevent Overdoses and Help People who are Addicted to Drugs

Data Shows Drug Overdose Rates in New Mexico higher than National Rates

(Santa Fe) -- The New Mexico Department of Health is reminding people that the abuse of drugs, including prescription medications, can cause serious addictions and deaths from overdoses. Data from the Department of Health shows that drug overdose death rates in New Mexico have dropped slightly since 2008, but the rates are still higher than the national rate.

"I encourage parents, family members and friends to learn about addictive drugs, both prescription and non-prescription opiates, and to talk with young people about the risks of overdoses," said Department of Health Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres. "Once people are addicted, it is extremely difficult for someone to stop using drugs. Prevention and education are the first lines of defense in combating with drug addictions and preventing overdoses."

In 2008, the drug overdose death rate in New Mexico was 24.9 per 100,000 people, in 2009 the rate was 20.1 and in 2010 the rate was 22.4. The actual number of drug overdose deaths in New Mexico was 513 in 2008, 427 in 2009 and 468 in 2010. Nationally, the most recent drug overdose death rate in 2008 was 11.9 per 100,000 people.

Males in New Mexico die of drug overdoses at a significantly higher rate than females. In 2008, the overdose rate for males was 32.7 per 100,000 and 17.1 for females. In 2009 the rate was 25.1 for males and 14.8 for females, and in 2010 the rate was 26.3 for males and 18.4 for females. According to the New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey, painkiller use to get high increased among high school students from 11.7 percent of students in 2007 to 14.3 percent of students in 2009.

The Department of Health offers several programs to educate individuals and communities about methods to decrease the dangerous health effects of opiate use and addiction. Services that are available to opiate users include drug treatment programs, syringe exchange programs, medication-assisted therapy and overdose prevention education. More than 9,000 people have been trained in Rescue Breathing and Narcan, which can help reverse an opiate-related drug overdose. Narcan has reversed approximately 3,000 overdoses in New Mexico since the program started in 2001.

Several laws in New Mexico also help address issues related to drug addiction and overdoses. In 2011, House Memorial 77 created the Prescription Drug Abuse and Overdose Task Force, which developed recommendations for health care provider licensing boards regarding use of opioids and treatment of



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pain. The Task Force also developed New Mexico Clinical Guidelines on Prescribing Opioids for Treatment of Pain. In July 2007, the 911 Good Samaritan Law went into effect allowing anyone to call emergency services or seek help for someone experiencing an overdose without fear of legal consequences related to reporting the overdose.

The New Mexico Board of Pharmacy maintains the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program which provides reports to health care providers of controlled substance prescriptions, including opiate prescriptions, for their patients. The Board of Pharmacy is working to make this data available to health care providers 24/7. This reduces the likelihood that multiple providers will be providing opioids to the same patient.

“Anyone using too much of an opiate can have an overdose regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, income, or whether using an illegal drug or a prescribed drug,” Dr. Torres said.

The Department of Health encourages New Mexicans to do the following to help prevent addictions and overdoses:

- Use prescription painkillers only as directed by a health care provider; do not share these with family and friends.
- Store prescription painkillers in a secure place and dispose of them properly.
- Talk with young people openly and honestly about drug use, addiction, and the risks.
- If you know an opiate user, learn about harm reduction, syringe exchange programs, medication-assisted therapy, and overdose prevention.
- If you know opiate users, make sure that they, their friends, and their family members have taken an overdose prevention course that will train them to help prevent an overdose and how to use Narcan to reverse an overdose.

If you or someone you know, needs help with addiction, please contact the Department of Health’s Helpline toll-free at 1-888-DOH-HEPC (1-888-364-4372).

More information regarding the Harm Reduction Program is available on the Department of Health’s website at http://nmhealth.org/IDB/harm_reduction.shtml.

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