



OHIO INJURY PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP

Injury Prevention Policy and Advocacy Action Group

Injury Prevention Policy Brief

9-1-1 Good Samaritan Law

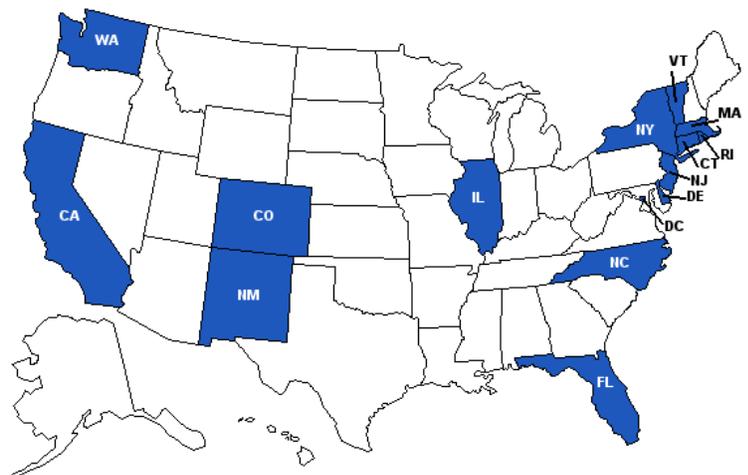
November 2013

SUMMARY

- ⇒ In Ohio, there were 327 fatal unintentional drug overdoses in 1999 growing to 1,765 annual deaths in 2011.
- ⇒ A recent survey of high-risk opioid users in Ohio found that only 58 percent of those who witnessed a drug overdose called 9-1-1.
- ⇒ Passage of a 9-1-1 Good Samaritan Law in Ohio would encourage bystanders to summon emergency responders without fear of arrest or other negative legal consequences.

To address these concerns, 14 states and the District of Columbia have adopted 9-1-1 Good Samaritan Laws that provide limited immunity from arrest and prosecution.⁴ Such laws protect only the caller and overdose victim from arrest and/or prosecution for simple drug possession, possession of paraphernalia, and/or being under the influence. These policies do not protect people from arrest for other offenses, such as selling or trafficking drugs, or driving while drugged.³

14 States and the District of Columbia have 9-1-1 Good Samaritan Laws⁴



OHIO'S DRUG OVERDOSE EPIDEMIC

Ohio is in the grips of a drug overdose epidemic. From 1999 to 2011, Ohio's death rate due to drug overdose increased 440 percent. Unintentional drug overdoses caused 1,765 deaths to Ohio residents in 2011. This is equivalent to 5 Ohioans dying every day or one Ohioan dying every 5 hours.¹

9-1-1 GOOD SAMARITAN LAWS

The chance of surviving a drug overdose depends on how fast one receives medical assistance. Studies show that death from a drug overdose takes anywhere from 1 to 3 hours, which gives bystanders time to intervene.² However, while witnesses of heart attacks rarely think twice about calling 911, studies show that witnesses of a drug overdose often hesitate to call for help or simply do not make the call for fear of arrest and other negative legal consequences.³

Good Samaritan Laws Would Increase the Likelihood that Ohioans Would Call for Help

94%

In a recent survey, 94 percent of high-risk opioid users in Ohio reported they would be more likely to call 9-1-1 in the event of an overdose if Ohio had a Good Samaritan Law.⁵

OHIO SURVEY OF HIGH-RISK OPIOID USERS

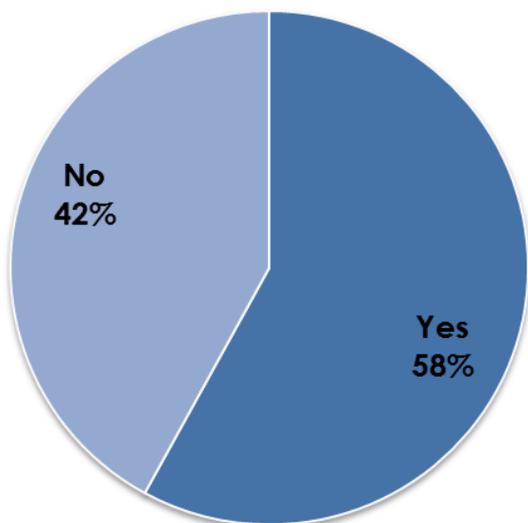
Two of Ohio's Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) sites implemented an optional client survey to gather data on attitudes and actions relating to drug overdoses.⁵ Project DAWN provides training and take-home doses of naloxone to those who are at high-risk for an opioid overdose.

Of the 104 high-risk opioid users surveyed, 94 percent reported they would be more likely to call 9-1-1 in the event of an overdose if Ohio had a Good Samaritan Law.

WITNESSED OVERDOSES ARE COMMON

Witnessing overdoses are a common occurrence among high-risk opioid users. 75 percent of those surveyed reported that they have witnessed a drug overdose. While witnessing an overdose is fairly common, respondents did not always call for help. In fact, only 58 percent of those who witnessed an overdose called 9-1-1.

CHART 2: Did you call 9-1-1 after the most recent overdose you witnessed?



HIGH RISK OPIOID USERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT CALLING FOR HELP

Half of those surveyed expressed concern about being arrested for calling 9-1-1 (49 percent) and a similar proportion expressed concern about the person overdosing being arrested (54 percent).

CHART 3: Are you concerned about being arrested if you call 9-1-1 in the event of a suspected overdose?

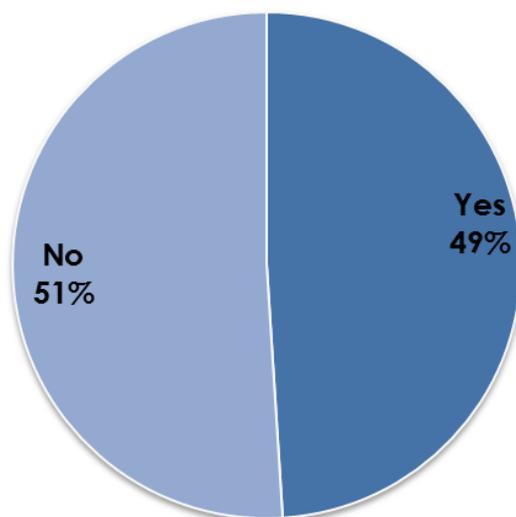
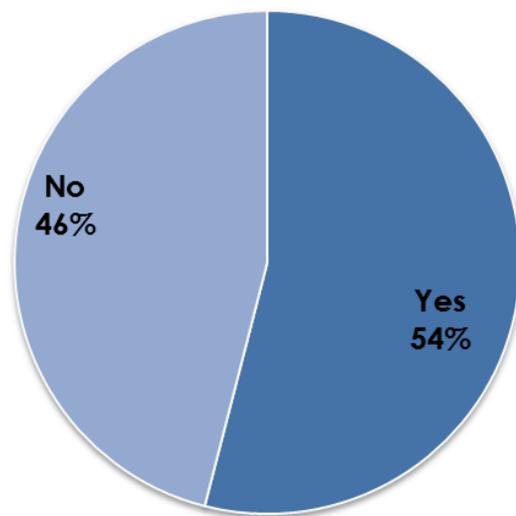


CHART 4: Are you concerned about the person overdosing being arrested if you called 9-1-1?



Methodology: The survey was conducted at two Project DAWN sites in Cuyahoga and Scioto counties between 8/1/13 and 10/1/13. The survey was optional and participation was not linked to program registration, making all responses anonymous. A total of 105 participants were surveyed with only one refusal resulting in a 99% response rate.

References: 1) Ohio Department of Health, Office of Vital Statistics; 2) Drug Policy Alliance. 911 Good Samaritan Laws: Preventing Overdose Deaths, Saving Lives. <http://www.drugpolicy.org/resource/911-good-samaritan-laws-preventing-overdose-deaths-saving-lives>; 3) Tracy M., et al. Circumstances of witnessed drug overdose in New York City: implications for intervention. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2005 Aug 1;79(2):181-90. Epub 2005 Feb 19. 4) Network for Public Health Law. LEGAL INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE OVERDOSE MORTALITY: NALOXONE ACCESS AND OVERDOSE GOOD SAMARITAN LAWS. http://www.networkforphl.org/_asset/qz5pvn/network-naloxone-10-4.pdf; 5) Project DAWN. Optional Overdose Survey. Data Analyzed by the Ohio Department of Health.