



**- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -**

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## **Fentanyl-Related Overdose Deaths Increase in Calhoun County**

CALHOUN COUNTY, MI— In a new report, Calhoun County Public Health Department describes opioid prescribing rates, emergency department visits for opioid overdoses, and a three-year analysis of drug and opioid overdose deaths from the Calhoun County Medical Examiner.

While prescription drug-related deaths and heroin-related deaths remain elevated, fentanyl-related deaths increased from 6 in 2015 to 31 (27 Calhoun County residents) in 2017. Fentanyl is a very powerful opioid that can be prescribed by a healthcare professional or produced illegally. Illegal fentanyl, also known as illicitly manufactured fentanyl, is now driving the opioid overdose epidemic and poses a serious public health threat to Calhoun County.

The report also outlines other key points:

- In 2016, 120 opioid prescriptions per 100 persons were dispensed in Calhoun County, nearly twice the national average.
- Although opioid overdose visits make up a very small percentage of all Calhoun County emergency department visits, opioid overdose visits nearly doubled from 147 to 289 visits between 2015-2017.
- The 2016 total opioid-related death rate of approximately 30 deaths per 100,000 Calhoun County residents was 1.72 times higher than the Michigan 2016 death rate of 17.5 deaths per 100,000 residents.
- More than 40 total opioid-related deaths have occurred each year in Calhoun County between 2015-2017.
- More people die of drug-related overdose in Calhoun County than of motor vehicle accidents.
- A continued multi-sector effort, such as through the Calhoun County Opioid Coalition, is needed to address the opioid epidemic.

“Prioritizing treatment for opioid addiction is essential to reversing the tide of opioid-related deaths,” states Dr. William Nettleton, Medical Director, Calhoun County Public Health Department.

An opioid is an addictive drug that eases pain and also causes feelings of extreme pleasure. Opioids include prescription medications like oxycodone and illegal drugs like heroin.

Dr. Nettleton notes, “Addiction is not a moral defect. It is a long-term, relapsing, and all-too-often deadly disease of the brain that affects not only the lives of addicted individuals – but their families and relationships as well.”

When taken alone and particularly with other drugs, including prescription medications, opioids can stop a person’s breathing and result in a deadly overdose. Signs of opioid overdose include extreme sleepiness, slow or absent breathing, very small eye pupils, and skin color turning blue. If you suspect an overdose, call 911 immediately. Michigan law protects individuals who possess illegal controlled substances in amounts for personal use from criminal drug charges if they are seeking medical attention for themselves or someone else in the event of a drug overdose (HB 5649).

Naloxone is a drug that can reverse the effects of an opioid and prevent a deadly overdose. Learn to perform rescue breathing techniques from your healthcare provider or naloxone trainer to aid a person in overdose. Again, always call 911 when aiding an overdose victim. Naloxone is covered by Medicaid and many other insurances and is available without a prescription at the following pharmacies listed on the [MDHHS website \(https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550\\_2941\\_4871\\_79584\\_79585\\_79587\\_79591---,00.html\)](https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_79584_79585_79587_79591---,00.html).

Naloxone kits are also available through the Southwest Michigan Chapter of FAN (Families Against Narcotics) at 269-580-8290.

If you, a family member, or friend needs help overcoming substance use disorder you may call Summit Pointe’s substance abuse services at 269-966-1460.

Medicaid patients may also access substance abuse services in Calhoun County by calling Southwest Michigan Behavioral Health’s access line at 800-781-0353.

The Calhoun County Opioid Coalition has been established to address the opioid epidemic in Calhoun County. This coalition aims to take a public health approach and includes multiple partners in the community such as Calhoun County Public Health Department, Substance Abuse Council, Summit Pointe, County Prosecutor’s Office, Sheriff’s Office, Bronson Healthcare, Oaklawn Hospital, and Grace Health, to name a few.

For more information on opioids and resources for patients, families, prescribers, pharmacists and communities visit:

[http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550\\_2941\\_4871\\_79584---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_79584---,00.html)

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