

Clark County Schools Make Changes Due to Drug Crisis

Posted: 6:00 a.m. Monday, August 14, 2017

SPRINGFIELD — Several Clark County school districts have made changes to address the expanding drug crisis, including one district that now keeps overdose revival drugs at its schools and more prevention efforts in the classroom.

A survey of six public Clark County school districts revealed one overdose incident that took place on school property last year — an overdose in the parking lot of Indian Valley School during its latchkey program.

The Southeastern Local School District now has naloxone kits — the drug used to revive overdose victims better known by its brand name Narcan — at both Southeastern High School and Miami View Elementary School as a proactive measure, Superintendent David Shea said.

Southeastern is the lone district in Clark County with Narcan on site.

“My initial thoughts were to have this for student in case, God forbid, something happened, that we have this on hand,” Shea said. “Through further discussions (we thought) what about parents or someone attending an event? That really hadn’t entered into my mind as much as a student.

“If you save a life, that’s a good deal. You can’t knock that. We’ve been fortunate we haven’t had an issue here,” he said.

South Charleston resident Kelly Mickens, whose daughter is a first grader at Miami View, understands the need for Narcan at the school, but also said she reservations about it.

“It’s an idea to be thrown around,” she said. “I wouldn’t say I’m 100 percent on board with it, but I understand if it’s something they feel they’ve got to have there.”

It’s always a possibility because the drug problem is rampant in Clark County and Ohio, Mickens said.

A record 86 people are suspected to have died from a drug overdose this year, including 66 confirmed deaths — the majority of which involve illicit fentanyl that’s 50 to 100 times more powerful than heroin, Clark County Coroner Dr. Richard Marsh said.

Clark County has seen nearly 800 overdoses this year, including 620 in Springfield, according to statistics provided by Clark County Prosecutor Andy Wilson.

‘All schools will have it’

A Southeastern school board member asked Shea to consider bringing Narcan into the buildings during the last school year. The kits were ordered at the end of the last school year and were donated to the district at no cost, Shea said.

While Southeastern may be the only school with Narcan on-site in case of an emergency, several superintendents told the Springfield News-Sun they plan to discuss it with their school board members.

More schools likely will stock Narcan, Shea said, especially as more and more people overdose in public.

“It’s going to heighten awareness,” he said. “Before it’s all said and done, all schools will have it.”

Southeastern school nurses are trained on how to use the medicine and Shea said he’ll likely have teachers and staff members also taught.

The biggest challenge is figuring out where to store Narcan kits, he said. It’s currently locked down with other medicine at Southeastern but could be placed with defibrillators.

Shea doesn’t believe South Charleston has a significant drug problem but said he’s not naive enough to think the activity isn’t occurring. Narcan is on site simply as a proactive measure, he said.

“We have a great town but just like any town, we have challenges we have to prepare for,” Shea said.

Mickens hopes the police can keep drugs off the street in the village so that the Narcan is never needed.

“It’s good they’re being proactive,” Mickens said. “I understand why they wouldn’t want an accident to happen because they weren’t prepared, even if it’s for someone from another school district.”

Overdoses at schools

Last fall a person was walking to their car to leave Indian Valley and noticed a woman was slumped over with children in the car, Greenon Superintendent Brad Silvus said.

The person tried to get the woman’s attention but couldn’t wake her up and then sought out a school nurse. Staff members then called 9-1-1, said Silvus, who also serves as the co-director of the Families of Addicts Springfield chapter.

The person was revived with assistance from the Enon police department, the Clark County Sheriff’s Office and the Mad River Twp. EMS, he said.

Silvus and school board members will discuss the district’s policies and procedures regarding overdoses and similar situations, he said. He will also speak to school nurses about their comfort level with Narcan.

Several other schools in Ohio have had overdoses, Silvus said, including some at football games in the Toledo area.

“We have to remember what our role is as a school,” he said. “It’s really no different than having a defibrillator.”

He’s also spoken with other districts about their policies. Local districts had hoped for some guidance from the state, he said, but no directives have been issued.

“Most people are still up in the air,” Silvus said. “If there’s any doubt, we would call for help immediately.”

Other schools

Several other districts, including Springfield, Tecumseh, Clark-Shawnee and Northeastern, have yet to discuss having Narcan ready in case of an overdose, local superintendents said.

Springfield City School District will talk about in the future, Superintendent Bob Hill said.

"I don't know what the right answer is for that," he said. "You want to be prepared, but is it the school's responsibility or is it the police and fire department's responsibility? Where does that fall and is there a line that you have to draw? It's not a discussion most school districts have broached at this point."

Clark-Shawnee hasn't had any overdoses on its sites but the topic is on the school board's radar, Superintendent Gregg Morris said.

The district has seen multiple children affected by the crisis throughout Clark County, he said. The district has two counselors with mental health backgrounds on staff to work with students.

"You see the stress on students, many times not living with parents," Morris said. "It definitely affects our kids and it particularly affects them with what happens outside the school day. We're asked to do more and more, but if there is a need for our students, we're going to do it."

Springfield also has a crisis intervention team to counsel children, Hill said.

"I can't imagine what that does to a kid," he said of students with family members who overdose.

Northeastern's school board has discussed the issue, Superintendent John Kronour said, but will likely stick with its current policy of calling EMS rather than stocking Narcan.

"Our plan would be to call 9-1-1," he said.

More education

The Clark County Combined Health District's 2015 Middle School Youth Risk Behavior study showed about 24 percent of middle school students surveyed said they tried alcohol at least one time, while another 11 percent tried marijuana and 6 percent tried cocaine.

More than 34 percent of high school students said they tried marijuana, according to the 2015 high school study. The study also showed more than 5 percent of students had tried heroin one or more times.

An updated study will be completed later this year, Clark County Health Commissioner Charles Patterson said. More education can help students make better choices, he said, but it's difficult to find resources to implement programs.