

Anchorage student fentanyl use prompts school district response, including more kits to reverse overdoses

By **Tim Rockey, Alaska Public Media - Anchorage** - April 28, 2023



Anchorage School District Healthcare Services Department Director Kathy Bell holds a nasal injector for Kloxxado, the brand name spray that contains Naloxone, an opioid-overdose reversing drug found in all Anchorage School District schools. (Tim Rockey/Alaska Public Media)

The Anchorage School District is ramping up efforts to educate students, staff and parents about the dangers of fentanyl amid an increase in use of the synthetic opioid by students.

The district has seen a spike in what it calls "fentanyl-related instances" in schools over the last two months. That includes 10 cases in the last month or so at five different high schools.

The district's Healthcare Services Director, Kathy Bell, said the district now provides five Naloxone kits at each high school, in response to the fentanyl uptick.

"It's just dangerous and can kill," Bell said. "The Naloxone can reverse that, if we catch it soon enough. And it's very scary to me."

District spokesperson Lisa Miller said none of the instances of students having taken fentanyl are believed to have occurred on school grounds, but the students began showing symptoms at school and were discovered by classmates or teachers.

Fentanyl can be mixed with other drugs, sometimes without the person using those drugs knowing it.

According to the state Department of Health, fentanyl overdose deaths in Alaska increased 150% from 2020 to 2021 and fentanyl was present in nearly three out of four opioid overdose deaths in 2021.

Kersten Johnson, the Anchorage School District's Secondary Education Director, said she's encouraging parents to talk to their kids about drug use.

"For most of the cases that I'm aware of, kids took it unknowingly," Johnson said. "And then had some sort of overdose medical event, which is why it's scary."

And that's happening across the country, she said.

"It's not just localized to the school district, but that's why we're really acting quickly and getting word out pretty widely," Johnson said. "Because it is becoming a growing concern in Anchorage."

The district began distributing Naloxone kits to schools about five years ago. The kits are located next to external defibrillators in the halls of all Anchorage schools.

According to the district, all school principals and district leadership received training on fentanyl earlier in April, including how to use a nasal injector to administer a dose of Naloxone.

The district has partnered with the state's [Project Hope](#), which conducts outreach and distributes Naloxone kits, and plans to host more events warning students and parents about the dangers of fentanyl.

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