

A new tool in drug overdose prevention

October 30 2014, by Joe O'connell

The Center for Disease Control [reported](#) earlier this month that the heroin overdose death rate across 28 states it surveyed doubled between 2010 and 2012. This sharp increase and the chilling statistics that say more than 110 Americans die each day of heroin and prescription opioid overdose are among the reasons law enforcement and public health officials are trying to find new ways to work together to stem the tide of fatalities.

One approach involves using naloxone, the [opioid overdose](#) antidote. The U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance on Monday released a new toolkit to help police better understand naloxone, how other [law enforcement](#) agencies are currently using it, and how they can develop their own overdose prevention programs.

Northeastern assistant professor Leo Beletsky, who has joint appointments in the School of Law and Bouvé College of Health Sciences, served as lead expert on legal and scientific issues in the toolkit development. He also wrote the "frequently asked questions" section to help law [enforcement agencies](#) gain a better understanding of the [public health](#) aspects of drug prevention.

"Overdose is a major public health crisis, and recently there has been a rapid uptake among [law enforcement agencies](#) in overdose prevention and rescue initiatives," Beletsky said. "When police show up to the scene of an overdose, there is a potential for them to take on a life-saving role in addition to being there in a law enforcement capacity."

To assist the DOJ in developing the toolkit, Beletsky and other experts addressed questions on a variety of topics including liability, information on naloxone, and effective ways to train law enforcement. Those FAQs dovetail with practical, real-world examples featured in the toolkit.

Beletsky noted that Massachusetts has become a national leader in scaling up overdose prevention. One national model is the city of Quincy where police have made nearly 300 overdose reversals in the past four years.

While Beletsky stressed naloxone is not the silver bullet for stopping the overdose epidemic, he believes overdose rescue training and related initiatives are something police should strongly consider.

"This toolkit is a platform for police, public health, and drug treatment officials to come together and collaborate on drug abuse issues, which is really critical," Beletsky says. "It also helps address the question of what [police](#) officers can do at the scene of a drug overdose to help prevent future [overdose](#) events."

Provided by Northeastern University

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