

Utah launches campaign to fight opioid abuse, overdoses

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Utah pharmacists will start putting red stickers on bottles of opioids that warn patients about the risk of overdose and addiction as part of a new awareness campaign to combat painkiller abuses and deaths.

The Utah Department of Health's monthlong campaign kicks off Monday and is meant to encourage dialogue between pharmacists and patients about [opioid](#) risks.

The rate of prescription opioids dispensed in Utah grew 30 percent from 2002 to 2015, statistics from the department show. Nearly 300 Utah residents died of opioid overdoses in 2015, according to the latest data available from the department.

"Given the high number of deaths associated with [prescription opioids](#), understanding the risks of opioids is vital to patient safety," said Angela Dunn, deputy state epidemiologist for the health department.

The new initiative is a collaborative effort by the health department, the Utah Pharmacy Association and the Utah Department of Commerce.

The red stickers—which read "Caution: Opioid. Risk of Overdose and Addiction"—will prompt patients to ask pharmacists questions about their potentially addictive medications, said Greg Jones, chairman of the Utah Pharmacy Licensing Board.

"People underestimate the danger of their medications," Jones said.

"People think they'll be fine taking it, and quite often they're not."

Pharmacists can discuss with patients proper use, storage and disposal of opioids and provide naloxone, an [overdose](#)-reversing drug.

The red-sticker campaign is just one of several initiatives the Utah Department of Health has been working on in recent years to reduce opioid overdoses and increase public awareness about the issue.

"It will take some time to see results," Dunn said. "But anecdotally, [patients](#) are becoming more educated on what an opioid is and the dangers it can possess."

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