



October 30, 2023

Dear Colleague:

In his 2023 State of the Union address, President Biden launched a major surge against illicit fentanyl that included actions to stop the flow of illicit drugs into our communities, expand access to life-saving resources, and prevent drug use before it begins. This work is already saving lives across the country; though the number of people who have died from an overdose in the last year was still unacceptably high at 107,000, it has begun to drop for the first time in years.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is so potent even a tiny amount can be fatal. As you have seen in your schools and communities, the rise of illicit fentanyl and its trafficking via social media is having a disproportionate impact on our children. Overdose deaths among adolescents [doubled from 2019 to 2020](#) and continue to rise, even though youth rates of drug use have remained stagnant. That's because a teenager today can log onto social media with a smartphone and buy what they think is an opioid pain medicine or a prescription stimulant to help them study—and instead die from one pill that actually has fentanyl in it. Just one pill. And [data](#) show that two-thirds of adolescent drug poisoning deaths occurred with a potential bystander nearby, but naloxone was often not administered.

**In the midst of this fentanyl overdose epidemic, it is important to focus on measures to prevent youth drug use and ensure that every school has naloxone and has prepared its students and faculty to use it.** We want to share resources that could help your school and community prevent drug use before it begins and keep students alive long enough to get the help they need in the event of an overdose or poisoning.

One of the most important roles you play as educators and administrators is creating safe environments where students can learn and thrive. As you know, drug use can threaten student safety and impact the growing brain. Stopping drug use before it starts is critical and effective. The [Drug-Free Communities Support Program](#) can be a key partner to schools seeking to stand up primary prevention initiatives. Research-based guides, such as [Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents](#), offer information and resources for parents, educators, and community leaders. Over the past year, the Department of Education's National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments' (NCSSLE) has added webinars to its "[Lessons from the Field](#)" series focusing on prevention, illicit fentanyl, and other resources to help schools develop safe, supportive, and drug free learning environments. Additionally, in partnership with the Ad Council, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) launched the [Real Deal on Fentanyl](#) campaign to educate young people on the dangers of fentanyl and the life-saving effects of naloxone.

Schools and communities can prepare for potential drug overdoses and poisonings by educating faculty, parents, and students on overdose prevention and response by learning the signs of an overdose, calling 911 when encountering a suspected overdose, and knowing how to use the opioid reversal antidote naloxone immediately. Now is the perfect time to develop or reevaluate schools' or school districts' [emergency operations plans](#) to ensure that school officials, first responders, and other community partners, including public health and public safety entities, are prepared to respond quickly if an emergency occurs. The Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center (REMS) has resources, including webinars, publications, guidance documents, and trainings, to assist schools and communities to support safety, security, emergency management and preparedness, including opioid-related emergencies.

Studies show that naloxone access can reduce overdose death rates, that its availability does not lead to increases in youth drug use, and that it causes no harm if used on a person who is not overdosing on opioids. It is important to note that individuals should not be afraid to administer naloxone, as most states have Good Samaritan Laws protecting bystanders who aid at the scene of an overdose. Our schools are on the frontlines of this epidemic, but our teachers and students can be equipped with tools to save lives.

The Biden-Harris Administration has taken a number of steps to improve access to naloxone. Last month, naloxone nasal spray became available for over-the-counter purchase by any person, without medical training required. It will be important for your schools to take advantage of this opportunity, and to encourage families to have naloxone at home. [Local public health departments](#), [state behavioral health agencies](#), and [state educational agencies](#) can be helpful in working with schools and districts to access naloxone. In addition, support in the form of state model laws that address [school responses to drugs and drug-related incidents](#) and [naloxone access](#) have been made available.

There is no time to waste when responding to an overdose, and it is critical that youth and school personnel can access naloxone on school grounds during and after school. Thank you for your partnership in protecting the health of our nation's students. We look forward to continuing to work together to address youth substance use and to save lives.

Sincerely,



Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.  
U.S. Secretary of Education



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