Bill expanding access to naloxone signed into law

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COLUMBIA — With Gov. Jay Nixon's signing of a bill Tuesday, Missouri pharmacists will be able to dispense naloxone via prescription or with physician approval.

Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, blocks the effects of an opioid overdose and can prevent death. It can be injected or administered through the nose.
"Increasing access to naloxone is a proven, safe and highly effective way to prevent opioid overdose deaths," Nixon said in a news release.

The law also legalizes the possession of naloxone without a prescription. Someone worried about a family member's drug addiction, for example, could have naloxone on hand in case of an overdose.

Rep. Steve Lynch, R-Waynesville, the sponsor of the bill, also sponsored the 2014 bill that allowed first responders to carry Naloxone.

In 2014, there were an estimated 47,000 drug overdose deaths in the U.S., and 61 percent (28,647) of them involved some type of opioid, including heroin.

Since 2000, the rate of deaths from drug overdoses involving opioids (opioid pain relievers and heroin) has increased 200 percent in the U.S, according to a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in January.

The number of drug overdose deaths in Missouri in 2014 was 1,067.

'It could save somebody's life'

Ron Fitzwater, chief executive officer of the Missouri Pharmacy Association, said members of the association did not ask Lynch to sponsor the legislation but were supportive of it. He noted that other states have passed even broader laws than Missouri's, making the drug available over the counter.

What the new law doesn't address is how people will be trained to administer the drug.

"A person picking it up as a third party is going to want some guidance," Fitzwater said.
He said the association had not delved deeply yet into the role pharmacists might play in providing that guidance. "We will certainly look to other states to see if there any best practices out there," he said.

After Lynch's 2014 bill passed, some Missouri law enforcement agencies, including the St. Louis County Police Department and Pulaski County Sheriff's Department, equipped their police officers and deputies with naloxone.

In Boone County, the Boone County Fire Protection District has trained firefighters to administer Naloxone. The training of the Fire District's 250 firefighters took place last July, and all of the Fire District's 14 fire trucks have carried naloxone kits in medical bags since last October, said Capt. Martina Pounds.

"The decision was just made by our command staffs that we are going to carry it because it could save somebody's life," Pounds said in an interview last spring.

"It does save people's lives. It works very well for opioid overdoses."

The Fire District has used Narcan once. Firefighters were dispatched Jan. 3 to reports of an unconscious person and found a woman who was no longer breathing. An opiate overdose was suspected, and the woman was given Narcan. She didn't respond until given an additional dose by paramedics on the ambulance. Her condition began to improve about the time she arrived at the hospital, Pounds said.
Pounds said naloxone on hand is mainly useful for some of the outlying areas the Fire District serves. Even just a little further could take an ambulance up to 20 minutes to get there, which is too long for someone overdosing, she said.

Normally, it takes about three to five minutes for Naloxone to take effect, said Capt. Chuck Doss, training division manager for the Fire District.

“I’ve seen it work as quick as a couple seconds. If you give it intranasally, sometimes it takes it a little bit to absorb into the system,” Doss said.

First responders will administer half a milligram of Naloxone and wait three to five minutes. If it doesn’t work, they’ll give the patients another half milligram.

“We give it gradually to take effect so that we don’t give them too much. How much it takes to work depends on the person and depends on the drug,” Doss said.

The two-hour training includes the introduction of the medicine, when and how to give it, the side effects and dosing. The firefighters practiced on fake calls and fake patients.

**Looking ahead**

Before the first law went into effect, only paramedics were trained to use Narcan. After that, it was added to EMT training as well.
The Columbia Police Department does not have naloxone kits. It is not actively researching or talking about doing so because Emergency Medical Services has a quick response time in Columbia, Columbia Police spokeswoman Bryana Larimer said in an email.

The Boone County Sheriff’s Department doesn’t carry naloxone either.

“There are some cost issues and training issues that we have not addressed yet,” said Maj. Tom Reddin of the Sheriff’s Department.

The price of Narcan has soared in recent years as increasing numbers of states have passed laws increasing access to the drug and demand has risen.

The Columbia Fire Department decided not to equip its firefighters with Naloxone because "we have a very robust ambulance service in Columbia. Consequently they arrive on the scene a little after but very close to the time we do," said Brad Fraizer, an associate fire chief.

The new law takes effect Aug. 28.

Supervising editor is Katherine Reed.