



Media Advisory

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Yakima County Struggling with Behavioral Health Issues

YAKIMA, WA – Checking in on your family and friends is important during the current pandemic. For many, the isolation people have been feeling can leave them feeling depressed, worried, and hopeless. The Department of Health notes that over 1.7 million Washington adults are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and 1.2 million are experiencing depression on most days.

In Yakima, a recent analysis on Emergency Department (ED) visits demonstrated that during the month of July alcohol-related Emergency Department (ED) visits were statistically elevated and there was an alert for drug overdose ED visits across the state for the week ending July 4th. The latest call volume data available for the Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Washington State Tobacco Quitline and the Washington Recovery Helpline show month over month increases in all these areas.

According to the Yakima County Coroner's records, in Yakima County, 49 people have lost their lives by overdosing on drugs so far this year. For comparison, 49 is the same number of overdose deaths Yakima County experienced for the **entire year of 2019**. Between March and July 2020 - 35 people in Yakima County have overdosed and died, which is **three times more** than the eleven who died during the same time period in 2019.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as has been done since 1993, the Yakima Health District has continued to offer syringe exchange services. The weekly syringe exchange program disposes of used syringes and exchanges them for clean syringes. This program was established to help prevent the spread of communicable diseases in our community. In response to the increase in overdoses, the Yakima Health District will be doubling its distribution of naloxone to community members from twice a month to every week. Naloxone is a nasal spray that can reverse an opioid overdose that is in progress. From January to June 2019 there were 190 naloxone kits distributed, and from January to June 2020, there were 135 naloxone kits distributed. Additionally, Fentanyl test strips are available, to help individuals detect if a drug has had Fentanyl added to it, which can make it lethal.

For many, this may be the first time in their lives that they are experiencing anxiety, sadness or depression. Know that you are not alone, this is an unprecedented time in many people's lives. In June, the Health Care Authority of Washington launched Washington Listens to support people affected by the stress of COVID-19. This phone line is a resource for people to help manage elevated levels of stress and connects people with community resources and is anonymous. It provides an outlet for people who are **not** in crisis but need an outlet to manage stress. They are available 7 days a week with limited weekend hours. To reach them phone **1 (833) 681-0211**.

Additional Resources

[Washington Listens](#)

[Washington State Tobacco Cessation Resources](#)

[Washington Recovery Help Line](#)

[Suicide Prevention Hotline](#)

[TakeBackYourMeds.Org](#)

QUOTES

“We knew there would be many secondary consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary measures to slow the spread in the community. Unfortunately, while we are demonstrating success in slowing the spread, we are also starting to see the toll the pandemic is taking on our community’s behavioral health. A reminder that currently groups of 5 or less may meet for behavioral health support, if needed, and following masking and social distance requirements, including support groups for those with substance use disorders. We know that it’s difficult not knowing what the future holds, so for now, unless you are gathering for these small behavioral health support groups, please continue to stay connected with friends, family and other loved ones virtually.”

Dr. Teresa Everson, Health Officer, Yakima Health District

“Research indicates that the different stages of a crisis disaster (natural or otherwise) also include a time when behavioral health needs increase, and it is anticipated that the fall and winter months will be especially challenging for our behavioral health. Those who are already struggling may experience symptoms becoming more severe at that time. As behavioral health professionals, we want everyone to know that they are not alone. Do not hesitate to reach out if you are experiencing thoughts and emotions that are negatively impacting your daily life. If you are a family member, neighbor or friend of someone who is struggling with their behavioral health or abusing substances, do not be afraid to ask that individual about how they are doing and if they need help—it could save a life. Comprehensive Healthcare continues to provide services including individual and group therapy as well as medication assisted treatment for substance use, and we are currently accepting new clients. For more information about our services, or to contact us, simply visit our website at www.comphc.org. Our local crisis line is (800) 572-8122.”

Jodi Daly, Ph.D., CEO and President, Comprehensive Healthcare.

“A notice for the community that there has been an increase in counterfeit pills made to look like Percocet “M30” and Xanax bars. The pills that have been sent off for testing have come back with Fentanyl and a myriad of other medications.”

Jim Curtice, Yakima County Coroner.

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