

NEWS FROM:

SENATOR JOSEPH F. VITALE

SERVING NEW JERSEY'S 19TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



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MIDDLESEX COUNTY LAUNCHES COUNTYWIDE OPIOID ANTIDOTE RAPID REPLENISHMENT PROGRAM FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Initiative led by Senator Vitale, Woodbridge Mayor McCormac, and Middlesex County Prosecutor Carey in Partnership with Raritan Bay Medical Center

TRENTON – Senator Joseph F. Vitale, who continues to spearhead the statewide effort to address the heroin and opiate crisis in New Jersey, joined with Middlesex County Prosecutor Andrew C. Carey, Woodbridge Mayor John E. McCormac, Raritan Bay Medical Center President and CEO Michael R. D'Agnes, FACHE, and Woodbridge Township Police Department Director Robert Hubner to announce the details of a new program that would allow for the rapid replenishment of Naloxone kits used by police officers throughout Middlesex County in response to opioid overdoses.

Through a partnership between Raritan Bay Medical Center and the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office, police officers from across the county will now be able to trade in used Naloxone kits for new ones free of charge at either of the medical center's locations in Perth Amboy or Old Bridge under the program. Naloxone, often referred to by its commonly known brand name Narcan, is a life-saving, opioid antagonist or antidote drug administered by first responders to reverse the effects of a heroin or other opioid overdose.

"Allowing law enforcement officers to continue to save the lives of overdose victims through the expedited replenishment of Naloxone supply without bearing the cost of the kits is a great stride in our effort to eliminate unnecessary deaths to heroin's grip," said Senator Vitale (D-Middlesex), lead sponsor of the "Opioid Antidote and Overdose Prevention Act" signed into law in 2013. "No one is immune to the disease of addiction. I am pleased to see the collaborative effort between law enforcement and the local medical community in this program that is sure to yield positive results for our community."

The program, which took effect earlier this week, is modeled after a similar one created last year in Ocean and Monmouth counties with Meridian Health, CentraState Healthcare System, and Barnabas Health, where police officers can go to any affiliated hospital within the counties and exchange used Naloxone kits for new, ready-to-use ones for free.

"The Woodbridge Police Department was one of the first departments in the County to implement the use of the opioid antidote Naloxone in January, 2015. WPD Officers have administered Naloxone more than 65 times to save individuals who have overdosed on the illegal use of heroin or other opiate drugs. The Naloxone replenishment partnership with the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office and Raritan Bay Medical Center is nothing short of a life-saving program that will greatly assist the WPD and county law enforcement agencies continue their rapid response in the effort to save lives," said Mayor John E. McCormac. "Given the extent of the opiate and prescription drug addiction epidemic throughout the county, state and nation, Woodbridge Township is looking to implement additional programs geared to patient treatment and recovery."

“We have a long history of serving the people of Middlesex County and partnership with law enforcement and all public safety agencies,” said Mr. D’Agnes. “Meridian Health and Raritan Bay Medical Center are committed to addressing this crisis and supporting this important life-saving initiative.”

While the opioid epidemic is widespread across the state, Middlesex County has seen the highest growth rate for deaths associated with heroin between 2010 and 2014, according to data reported by the New Jersey State Medical Examiner’s Office. In 2014, the last year for which data has been reported, there were 78 heroin-related deaths in Middlesex County alone, the second highest count for counties in the state.

“Our efforts in the fight against this epidemic which is claiming too many lives must continue,” added Senator Vitale. “If we are to have a chance at winning this battle, we must improve the capabilities of emergency responders to save lives with Naloxone. But we must also look beyond and focus our efforts on education, prevention, treatment and recovery in our schools, homes, and in our communities.”

The event was held at Raritan Bay Medical Center’s Medical Pavilion at Woodbridge. Participants included Russ Molloy, Esq., Senior Vice President of Government Relations for Meridian Health; Carl Maslag, Pharmacy Manager, Southern Ocean Medical Center; Middlesex County Freeholder Director Ron Rios; Middlesex County Freeholder James Polos; Woodbridge Municipal Councilwoman Debbie Meehan; Dennis Green, Director of Woodbridge Department of Health and Human Services; Robert Hubner, Director, Woodbridge Township Police Department; and Joseph Nisky, Deputy Director, Woodbridge Township Police Department.

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