



Episode 9: Opioid Abuse and Misuse Prevention and Intervention in Schools

#REMSontheAir Podcast Intro (Recorded): [00:00:00] Welcome to the #REMSontheAir Podcast, hosted by your partners at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools and its Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center. If you're an old friend, you know us as the REMS TA Center, your national school safety center.

Join us as we chat about key topics in school and campus safety, security, and emergency management with experts and partners from the field.

Janelle Hughes: Hello and welcome back. This is Janelle Hughes, Project Director of the REMS TA Center. I'm joined by our Training Manager Amanda Everett, and today we're going to talk about opioids, drug-related emergencies, and substance abuse prevention.

Amanda Everett: Janelle, this is such a critical topic for [00:01:00] schools to be aware of and get support with addressing and managing. Opioid use and abuse was declared a national public health emergency in 2017, and it's a concern to schools, because it so broadly and deeply affects individuals and communities. First, we want to make sure we have a common understanding of what we mean when we are referring to opioid use, misuse, or abuse.

Prescription opioids can be misused or abused by an individual who takes another person's opioid prescription, even if it is to relieve their own pain, and opioid medication in ways other than prescribed, such as taking it more often, taking more than the prescribed dose, snorting or injecting the drug, or mixing it with alcohol or other drugs not described as safe by a doctor or pharmacist. Or the opioid prescription to get high.

Janelle Hughes: Schools may find the threat of opioid misuse and abuse affects their population in several possible ways. Students [00:02:00] may use or abuse opioids themselves, leading to issues with drug dependence, addiction, and even the potential for overdose. Parents, guardians, family members, or roommates of students may be dealing with addiction issues at home, with members of their household using or abusing opioids themselves.

And parents and guardians may be unaware that opioids they have in the home are being taken by their children. Teachers, administrators, and staff may have opioid use or abuse issues, as well. Members of the educational community might bring drugs physically to the campus grounds and in some cases lead to drug dealing on or around the property.

Members of the school community as a whole may be affected by corollary issues that result from drug use, and—such as increased property crime, fighting, vandalism, and the presence of weapons, drugs, alcohol, or discarded drug paraphernalia. This can affect the [00:03:00] overall safety of the environment and students' sense of safety as well.

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Amanda Everett: But how do schools plan for an opioid overdose? We like to look at it from the lens of before, during, and after an incident and also within the framework of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery, as featured in the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (or, as we refer to it, the *School Guide*) and *The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (or, as we refer to it, the *District Guide*).

We have many resources on our Website on these *Guides*. And you may be familiar with the six-step planning process described within them. Schools can use this process to develop an Opioid Overdose Annex.

Janelle Hughes: Collaborative planning teams are formed in Step 1, and they should specifically include representation from public health, school nurses, and emergency medical services to address this topic.

In [00:04:00] Step 2, important data related to the prevalence of opioid misuse in the school and surrounding community can be gleaned from public health agencies, culture and climate assessments, and other student surveys like the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. In Step 3, goals and objectives are determined to achieve the best outcome for before, during, and after an opioid overdose, and then in Step 4, schools will identify courses of action to address the what, who, when, where, why, and how to achieve those outcomes.

Using scenario-based planning can really help teams imagine the different ways that an opioid overdose may unfold, as well as the steps to take.

Amanda Everett: In Step 5, the Opioid Overdose Annex is reviewed and then shared with community partners who have a responsibility in opioids, such as first responders and local public health officials, for review and approval.

Finally, in Step 6, [00:05:00] the annex is maintained through regular reviews, especially as opioid, drug, and substance use changes from the population most affected to the types of drugs that are most prevalent. Also, stakeholders are trained here in Step 6 on courses of action, such as administering naloxone, and the annex's exercise.

Janelle Hughes: Now, we're going to pivot and talk about substance use prevention. We know that family outreach is an important component of this work, especially because parents have the number one influence on their children's decisions when it comes to alcohol and drug use. Research shows that young people really are listening to their parents and what they have to say.

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The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration runs a national media campaign called “Talk. They Hear You.”® to provide parents and caregivers with tools and resources to have those key conversations with their kids [00:06:00] early and often to help prevent underage drinking and other drug use.

Let’s talk a little bit about substance use prevention among the adolescent population. In 2016, an estimated 239,000 adolescents aged 12 to 17 were current misusers of pain relievers, and 631,000 young adults aged 18 to 25 misused pain relievers in the past month. Among adolescents aged 12 to 17, 152,000 had a pain reliever use disorder in the past year.

Amanda Everett: Those statistics are staggering. Schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education may find the threat of opioid misuse and abuse affects their population in several possible ways.

Students may use/abuse [00:07:00] opioids themselves, leading to issues with drug dependence, addiction, and even the potential for overdose. Parents, guardians, family members, or roommates of students may be dealing with addiction issues at home with members of their household using or abusing opioids themselves. And parents and guardians may be unaware that opioids they have in the home are being taken by their children. Teachers, faculty, and staff may have opioid use or abuse issues, as well.

Janelle Hughes: These and other potential issues that might arise from opioid misuse and abuse, with the status of the opioid crisis as a public health emergency, make it a threat that schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education may want to consider addressing in their preparedness efforts and within their emergency operations plans.

Due to the potential for loss of life, these entities may decide to focus on protocols to address opioid overdose within, again, their comprehensive, high-quality [00:08:00] EOP [emergency operations plan].

Amanda Everett: REMS TA Center’s Preparing for Opioid-Related Emergencies for K-12 Schools and Institutions of Higher Education provides details on how to integrate planning around this topic into the six-step planning process.

To address an opioid overdose incident, the planning team can seek the additional input of individuals who have expertise in treating opioid overdoses directly: those with experience in treating drug or alcohol addiction, including opioids, and those with expertise in public health, including public health emergencies or public health campaigns.

These may include campus health service providers or school nurses; first responders, including local campus law enforcement, fire department, and emergency medical services; occupational

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safety experts; public health professionals; emergency management; and Drug Free Community Support Program grantees, among others. [00:09:00]

Janelle Hughes: We definitely want to connect you with some resources to support your work. First, the REMS TA Center researched and published a fact sheet on preparing for opioid-related emergencies for K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. Download and read that to learn more about developing an Opioid Overdose Annex.

You can find a link to that on our podcast page. This fact sheet also references more resources that you can explore. The REMS TA Center hosted a webinar on *Opioids, Drug-Related Emergencies, and Substance Abuse Prevention Before, During, and After the COVID-19 Pandemic*, which features Dr. Fisher as a presenter.

Definitely watch this archived 90-minute webinar that explores the concepts we talked about today more in depth and features Federal resources to support your work on youth drug abuse and substance abuse prevention.

Amanda Everett: Now that you've learned more about this topic, we encourage you to first [00:10:00] check to see if your school has an Opioid Overdose Annex in its emergency operations plan. If not, your school safety planning team may want to consider developing one.

Second, we encourage you to look into opioid prevention and response programs, funding, and resources available in your state and locality.

Lastly, think about with whom you can share the resources and information we discussed today—and even this podcast. Think about those with roles and responsibilities in opioids, drug-related emergencies, and substance abuse prevention.

Janelle Hughes: Thanks, Amanda, and thanks so much to everyone for tuning in. Remember to follow the REMS TA Center on social media at @remstacenter and to bookmark the #REMSontheAIR hashtag. You can also tweet us using the #REMSontheAIR hashtag if you are dealing with similar topics.

If you have any questions on the things we talked about today or just want to learn more, send us your questions by email, or give us a call at 1-855-781-7367 [00:11:00] to pose questions that can possibly be featured on the podcast.

And, of course, don't forget that you can also email us at any time at info@remstacenter.org to join our mailing list, where you'll get up-to-date information on webinars, Web chats, and other virtual opportunities to learn and share. Thanks again for tuning in.