

AuburnPub: New York prison inmates slated to learn how to use naloxone, antidote for heroin ODs

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The state wants inmates at a Queens correctional facility — and beyond — to leave prison with a life-saving skill.

According to the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, inmates at the Queensboro Correctional Facility will receive training on how to administer naloxone — an antidote that counters heroin overdoses.

The training will be offered at the all-male, medium-security facility as part of a pilot Opioid Overdose Prevention program.

In a press statement released Friday, DOCCS said the program will educate inmates about the dangers of opiate use and what to do if they suspect someone has overdosed on heroin. Inmates will also learn about the state's Good Samaritan Law, which shields those who seek help for a person who has overdosed from prosecution.

All inmates who complete the training will receive a naloxone kit when they are released from prison.

DOCCS expects the Opiate Overdose Prevention program will eventually be offered at each of the state's 54 prisons. That includes the Auburn Correctional Facility in Auburn and the Cayuga Correctional Facility in Moravia, Cayuga County's two prisons.

Reflecting on research that shows the leading cause of death among former jail and prison inmates is drug-related overdoses, Anthony J. Annucci, DOCCS' acting commissioner, praised the program.

"Arming those leaving our correctional facilities with the knowledge and training they need to deal with a potential opioid overdose situation is a valuable tool for this vulnerable at-risk population," he said. "I am pleased DOCCS will offer such an exceptional program that can help save lives in the community."

In addition to launching the pilot program, the department issued a standing order that allows DOCCS' nurses to administer naloxone to inmates they suspect have overdosed on opiates. Previously, nurses had to obtain a doctor's order before giving the antidote.

Naloxone, a medication administered via a nasal spray, temporarily blocks the effects of opiates, allowing an overdose patient to breathe. If given to a patient who has not overdosed on heroin, naloxone has no effect.

The pilot program comes from a cooperation between DOCCS, the state Department of Health and the Harm Reduction Coalition.

It was introduced to the public on the heels of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's announcement that his office reached a deal with Amphastar Pharmaceuticals to lower and cap the cost of antidote.