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**New Jersey Continues Battle Against Opioid Epidemic**

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According to the New Jersey Attorney General's office, more than 3,100 people died of drug overdoses in New Jersey in 2018 largely resulting from the ongoing opioid epidemic. New Jersey continues to take bold steps in an effort to combat this crisis head-on.

On June 7, 2019, Governor Phil Murphy announced that, as part of a pilot program, pharmacies across the State would be distributing free doses of Narcan on June 18. Narcan, a brand name for naloxone, is the drug commonly used to reverse an opioid overdose. Those who visited one of the 175 participating pharmacies on that day received a single dose of Narcan on a first-come, first-serve basis. "Naloxone is a critical component in our efforts to combat the opioid epidemic and save lives. Last year in New Jersey, first responders administered the drug more than 16,000 times, preventing thousands of deaths," said Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal. "By participating in the Murphy Administration's pilot program to provide naloxone free of charge, New Jersey pharmacies are not only expanding access to this life-saving drug, they're reinforcing their role as vital allies in the battle to end New Jersey's opioid crisis." In addition, information on addiction and recovery options were distributed.

In the same vein, this week New Jersey Health Commissioner Shereef Elnahal authorized paramedics to treat acute opioid withdrawal symptoms with a drug called buprenorphine, often referred to by the brand name Suboxone. Effective immediately, Executive Directive No. 19-004 allows the medical directors of New Jersey's 21 Mobile Intensive Care Unit (MICU) programs to permit paramedics to carry and administer buprenorphine to mitigate the severe symptoms of opioid withdrawal after the use of Narcan. Prior to each administration, paramedics are required to get authorization from the hospital Emergency Department overseeing the medical care provided by the MICU.

In addition to these aggressive efforts to reduce drug overdoses and deaths, New Jersey may begin fighting the opioid epidemic from the prescription's inception. Bill A3292 would require that prescription opioid medications include a warning sticker advising patients of the risk of addiction and overdose. The sticker would be black with white font to make it clearly readable.

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This bill has passed both houses of the Legislature. Governor Murphy, who has already taken several steps to fight the opioid crisis, will now determine whether to sign the measure into law or veto it. If signed into law, the New Jersey Board of Pharmacy will need to specify the exact language of the warning label.

For more information on this Legal Alert or related issues, contact Meghan V. Hoppe, Esq. at [mvh@spsk.com](mailto:mvh@spsk.com) or (973) 540-7351.

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