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News Release

Utah Pharmacists Can Now Dispense Naloxone without a Prescription *Naloxone is a life-saving medication that reverses opioid overdoses*

(Salt Lake, UT) – Today, the executive director of the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) signed a statewide standing order allowing pharmacists to dispense naloxone, without a prior prescription, to anyone at increased risk of experiencing an opioid overdose. Naloxone is a safe and legal drug that can reverse heroin and prescription opioid overdoses by blocking the effects of opiates on the brain and restoring breathing in minutes. There is no potential for abuse and side effects are rare.

“Opioid overdose can be reversed and death prevented by timely administration of naloxone,” said Dr. Joseph Miner, executive director of the UDOH. “As authorized by state law, this standing order is intended to increase access to naloxone for those who might be at risk of an overdose or who might be in a position to assist somebody at risk of an overdose.” Naloxone can be administered via a nasal spray (commonly known as Narcan®) or intramuscular injection.

Six Utahns die every week from opioid overdoses. In 2015, 268 Utahns died from a prescription opioid overdose (such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, methadone, morphine, and fentanyl), 127 died from illicit opioids such as heroin, and 10 deaths involved both prescription and illicit opioids; an average of 33 each month (13.5 per 100,000 population). An estimated 80% of heroin users start with prescription drugs. Utah ranks 4th highest in the nation for drug overdose deaths.

Those at highest risk of an opioid overdose include individuals who:

- Are taking high doses of opioids for long-term management of chronic pain
- Have a history of substance abuse or a previous non-fatal overdose
- Have lowered opioid tolerance as a result of completing a detoxification program or recently being released from incarceration
- Are using a combination of opioids and other drugs such as benzodiazepines (Klonopin, Valium, Xanax) or alcohol

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- Are unfamiliar with the strength and dosage of prescription opioids and the purity of street drugs like heroin
- Are alone when using drugs
- Smoke cigarettes or have a respiratory illness, kidney or liver disease, cardiac illness, or HIV/AIDS

During the 2016 General Legislative Session, Rep. Steve Eliason sponsored House Bill 240, Opiate Overdose Response Act, passed authorizing the Utah Department of Commerce and UDOH to implement a standing prescription drug order to dispense naloxone. Additional laws passed in recent years expanding access to naloxone and providing protections for bystanders to report an overdose without fear of criminal prosecution for illegal possession of a controlled substance or illegal drug.

“This important policy will save lives and give people’s sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, a second chance at life and hopefully help them step out of substance abuse once and for all,” said Eliason.

While not mandatory for pharmacies to participate in the standing order, those that do are encouraged to voluntarily register with the UDOH. Additionally, Utah Administrative Rule 156-17b-625 requires pharmacists dispensing naloxone under the standing order to report annually to the UDOH the total number of single doses of naloxone dispensed and the name of each naloxone product dispensed along with the total number of single doses of that particular product.

"Providing naloxone more quickly to the Utah public may be the difference between life and death for those struggling with opioid use disorders. The Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing appreciates the strong support of Governor Gary Herbert, the Utah Legislature, the Department of Health, and others in making naloxone available to protect our citizens,” said Francine A. Giani, executive director of the Utah Department of Commerce.

To learn more about naloxone and the standing order visit <https://naloxone.utah.gov>. For information on opioids, visit <http://opidemic.org>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public’s health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care and promoting healthy lifestyles.