

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Bipartisan Resolution Designating July 14 as 'Fentanyl Poisoning Awareness Day'

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ATLANTIC CITY – As fentanyl continues to be the leading substance in New Jersey's overdose crisis and has contributed to the tragic deaths of thousands of New Jersey residents, Governor Phil Murphy today signed a bipartisan resolution to designate an annual 'Fentanyl Poisoning Awareness Day' in our state. As part of the Administration's ongoing efforts to prevent overdoses and combat the effects of the opioid crisis on our communities, this resolution aims to help raise awareness about the dangers of fentanyl and honor the lives lost to this substance.

Fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid that is often taken on its own or laced in fake prescription pills, heroin, cocaine and other drugs, was involved in nearly 75 percent of drug overdose-related deaths (https://ocsme.nj.gov/Dashboard?_gl=1*115k4*_ga*MTQyNjc4NzU2OC4xNjYwMTM2ODc4*_ga_5PWJG6642*MTY4NzQ2MzI5MS41MTIuMC4xNjg3NDYzMjk0LjAuMC4w) in New Jersey in 2019 – a drastic increase from its involvement in less than 4 percent of drug-related deaths just seven years prior. This reflects a national trend of increased fentanyl-related deaths as well as overall opioid-related overdose deaths.

New Jersey is also currently experiencing a rapid increase in fentanyl adulterated or associated with xylazine (FAAX). The White House has declared FAAX an emerging threat nationwide and the New Jersey Department of Health recently issued a Health Alert (<https://www.nj.gov/health/populationhealth/documents/XylazineintheNewJerseyIllicitDrugSupply.pdf>) to inform about the public health risk and about opportunities to reduce harm.

"Fentanyl has taken the lives of far too many New Jerseyans, leaving behind loved ones and entire communities to grieve these tragedies," **said Governor Murphy**. "I encourage everyone throughout our state to not only raise awareness about the dangers of fentanyl on this annual day, but to help educate others and work to mitigate the harms of fentanyl every day of the year. Together we can and will work to save the lives of our fellow community members impacted by the national opioid crisis."

One of the lives lost to fentanyl was New Jersey resident Max Lenowitz, who died of a fentanyl overdose on his 25th birthday after being found with a counterfeit pill. The resolution honors his memory and the memory of the many other New Jerseyans who have lost their lives because of fentanyl.

Fentanyl Poisoning Awareness Day will take place annually on July 14. The Governor will issue a proclamation each year to call on public officials and community members to observe the day with activities and programs that bring attention to this critical issue.

The annual day will build upon the Administration's ongoing efforts alongside State and local partners to address the opioid crisis on behalf of New Jersey residents. Harm from fentanyl can be reduced through efforts like overdose prevention education, the distribution and use of naloxone, and access to substance use treatment.

Fentanyl test strips have proven effective in testing drugs for the presence of fentanyl and are an essential tool in protecting against fentanyl overdose. Last year, Governor Murphy decriminalized (<https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562022/20220118b.shtml>) these supplies; they are now available from Harm Reduction Centers (<https://www.nj.gov/health/hivstdtb/hrc/>) and other key partners around New Jersey.

The Governor also created a first-in-the-nation program, administered by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, to allow anyone 14 years and older in our state to obtain naloxone anonymously and for free at participating pharmacies. Naloxone is a life-saving medicine that can reverse opioid overdoses - including overdoses from fentanyl - making it a key component of harm reduction efforts. Since the creation of the Naloxone365 (<https://nj.gov/humanservices/stopoverdoses/>) initiative, over 25,000 naloxone kits have been distributed to more than 600 pharmacies throughout the state.

Other efforts include streamlining access to substance use disorder-related services through ReachNJ (<https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/reachnj/about/overview/>).

The New Jersey Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund Advisory Council continues to gather input from members of the public, experts, and other stakeholders on the best use of opioid settlement funds (<https://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562022/approved/20220831a.shtml>) in order to help the many individuals, families, and communities impacted by the opioid crisis. The next public listening session (<https://www.nj.gov/opioidfunds/>) is July 20.



"New Jersey continues to experience a dramatic loss of life due to overdose, largely driven by illicit fentanyl. Overdose deaths are the leading cause of injury and represent more deaths every year than car crashes, suicides, and homicides combined. Every life lost is a preventable tragedy," **said Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli**. "At the New Jersey Department of Health, we are committed to fighting alongside all New Jersey residents to end this crisis."

"Fentanyl-involved overdoses have tragically affected too many New Jersey families," **said Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "This Fentanyl Poisoning Awareness Day should serve as a reminder to those struggling with the illness of addiction that recovery is possible, and help is available through 1-844-REACH NJ help line, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This awareness day should also serve as a reminder that anyone can save a life. Naloxone is safe, easy to use and effective in reversing overdoses – it's also available free and anonymously at many New Jersey pharmacies."

"Illegal fentanyl use created a deadly epidemic that has touched every corner of our country, and New Jersey wasn't spared. Oftentimes, victims of fentanyl poisoning are unaware that the substances they are ingesting contain lethal doses of the drug," **said Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin**. "We're thankful that the Murphy Administration recognizes the dire need to educate New Jersey residents on the dangers of fentanyl poisoning and recognize the lights extinguished by the increase of this synthetic opioid in the illicit drug market. And we're grateful that Governor Murphy has given us the necessary resources to develop and implement programs that connect individuals struggling with substance use disorder to care."

Sponsors of this resolution include Senators Holly Schepisi and Joseph Vitale as well as Assemblyman Christopher DePhillips.

"This bipartisan legislation is an important milestone in the fight against the epidemic of Fentanyl poisoning in New Jersey. I am honored to have sponsored this legislation and I am pleased that Governor Murphy has signed this bill into law," **said Senator Holly Schepisi**. "Far too many young Americans, like Max Lenowitz, a son, a brother, an athlete, and a friend to so many have had their lives cut short due to Fentanyl poisoning. July 14th is the day Max was born and represents the day that he tragically lost his life on his 25th birthday. By designating July 14th as Fentanyl Poisoning Awareness Day, we can remember the victims of this lethal drug and work towards preventing future deaths from occurring."

"My heart breaks for the families and friends who have lost loved ones to fentanyl," **said Senator Vitale, Chair of the Senate Health Committee**. "While we have taken proactive steps to reduce harm like decriminalizing fentanyl test strips and increasing access to opioid antidotes, like Naloxone, more can and must be done. This resolution will help us spread the word on the dangers of fentanyl more broadly and possibly save lives, even as we honor the memories of those who have been taken from us too soon."

"Max Lenowitz' mother turned a tragedy into an opportunity to shine a light on the crisis that took her son on July 14, 2022, his 25th birthday," **said Assemblyman DePhillips**. "Facing every parent's worst nightmare, Patrice set out to save lives by bringing awareness to the dangers of fentanyl. Recognizing her efforts to prevent other families from experiencing the same pain she had to endure, and furthering her message by creating this day is the legacy her son and other victims deserve."

Governor Phil Murphy

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