

Important Information About Heroin Use

The use of heroin in West County has risen significantly over the last four years. County Police Chief Tim Fitch reported on April 7, 2011 at a news conference that there is a heroin crisis in our community. Fatalities related to heroin increased from 54 -60 between 2009 and 2010. This year, 18 deaths have already been reported due to heroin. Most local users are from the western and southern parts of St. Louis County. There have been 320 deaths due to heroin between 2001 and 2011. In 2010 there were 60 deaths. The National Institute of Drug Abuse reported in a 2008 National Survey that the number of current heroin users aged 12 or older increased from 153,000 in 2001 to 213,000 in 2008. There were 114,000 first-time users 12 or older in 2008.

On March 2, 2011, the Tri-County Citizens Advisory Board sponsored a conference, "Battling Heroin in Our Community. Speakers included Dr. David Ohlms, well known in the field of Addiction and Psychiatry, a member of the St. Charles County Regional Drug Task Force, two Missouri State Probation and Parole Officers, two recovering heroin addicts, and a mother of a heroin addict. The purpose of the conference was to bring awareness regarding its growing popularity in our communities. There is a misconception that your children will not be exposed to heroin because it has been associated mainly with the inner city.

Initially, many children will be exposed to heroin at parties with friends they already know. The use may start by snorting heroin which seems less scary or dangerous. Today's heroin is also cheaper and purer than 30 years ago. The average dose costs about \$10 and is about 90% pure as opposed to 1% - 10% pure. However, once exposed to heroin, statistics show that most users will eventually turn to injecting the substance due to the rush achieved from injection versus snorting it.

There are numerous symptoms and clues parents can look for such as:

deteriorating physical appearance, wearing long sleeves in the summer (hides track marks), increased isolation or withdrawal from family and family activities, aluminum foil in their bedroom, missing spoons from the kitchen (both used to prepare heroin for injection) abrupt changes in school attendance, grades and friends.

For more information, please refer to the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) at www.drugabuse.gov.