

A bad broken record - Annual Madison County overdose deaths reach all-time high in November

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November 19 2018 11:50 AM



EDWARDSVILLE – In a year of rapid development and notoriety for many areas of the Riverbend, one grim statistic is rearing its head to break an unprecedented record.

As 2018 clicks down to its ending with a bit of time still on the clock, Madison County has already broken its record for most opioid-related death investigations in the Riverbend. As of now, 92 fatal overdoses have been reported, according to a Monday release from Madison County Coroner Stephen Nonn. This number overtakes the previous high of 2014's 91 deaths. In the release, Nonn said some cases are awaiting final toxicology reports, but enough evidence exists to rule the cause of death as opioids whether by substances found on the scene or the decedent's history of drug use.

Of that increase, perhaps Fentanyl is to blame. In previous interviews with Riverbender.com regarding the opioid epidemic gripping Madison County and the rest of the nation, Nonn said that particular opioid is as much as 50 times more powerful than heroin. In fact, the switch between deaths by heroin, whether on its own or in conjunction with other drugs – such as meth to make a dangerous “speedball”- and Fentanyl taking more lives dates only to around 2015-2016.

In 2016, 71 overdoses were investigated with 14 of them involving heroin and 20 involving Fentanyl. In previous interviews with first responders, reporters from Riverbender.com have been told the life-saving drug, Narcan, which is used across the nation to revive those suffering from overdoses, may be required to be attempted a few times, instead of the miraculous claim of one dose. That claim was true when the antidote first hit the streets around five years ago, but stronger opioids require significantly more dosages.

“Most tragically is the number of people who are left behind to grieve in the wake of this continuing epidemic,” Nonn said in a release. “It is an epidemic that continues to be a serious criminal justice problem and public health concern that is taxing the resources of first responders, social services, the justice system and our office is certainly not excluded from that list.”

Nonn said costs to cope with the opioid epidemic are on the rise, but added his office works with the Madison County Board's Finance and Government Operations Committee for a collaborative effort to identify the seriousness and danger of the epidemic. In a release, Nonn said maintaining that funding is a less-often recognized entity of public safety.

“It is true that over the last couple of years, there has been some paring back of budgets and spending throughout county government – including some areas of my budget – but in the end, the Office of Coroner and the Finance Committee engaged in very productive dialogue in protecting areas of budgeting and spending as the overdose surge continues,” Nonn said in the release. “This process was a partnership discussion with our office fairly proposing what we needed and could justify to complete our mission task and finance committee, along with the full Madison County Board listening, being engaged and being responsive to the public safety needs of the citizens of Madison County.”

This epidemic has taken as many as 72,000 lives annually in the United States. Nonn said his office promotes a system of education, enforcement and treatment to battle what is seeming to be more and more of a daunting foe.