



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Frosh, U.S. Attorney Rod Rosenstein Mark Week of September 19th “Heroin and Opioid Awareness Week”
Heroin and Opioid-Related Abuse is Most Deadly Issue Facing Maryland and the Nation; Overdoses in Maryland are Being Investigated as Homicides

BALTIMORE, MD (September 16, 2016) - Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh and U.S. Attorney Rod Rosenstein joined state and federal officials throughout the country in proclaiming the week of September 19th as “Heroin and Opioid Awareness Week” to bring attention to the epidemic of heroin and opioid-related overdose deaths in Maryland.

Opioid and heroin addiction and abuse across the nation is rampant. In Maryland alone, heroin-related deaths increased by over 200% from 2011 to 2015, rising from 247 to 748. There has also been an alarming spike in deaths from fentanyl, rising 105% during the first quarter of 2016 as compared to the same time in 2015. The increases in overdose deaths are not just seen in Maryland’s larger cities – they have been reported throughout the state, including western and central Maryland and the Eastern Shore.

“Raising awareness is just one step in addressing this widespread, complex epidemic in our State,” said Attorney General Frosh. “Opioids are highly addictive and extremely dangerous, altering the users’ brain permanently, even after just one use. Our goal is to educate as many people as possible so that we save lives, and prosecute those that traffic illegal heroin into Maryland. Addiction to opiates is dangerous, whether obtained through prescriptions or on the street.”

“Heroin and Opioid Awareness Week gives us the chance to educate the public about the dangers of heroin and opioid abuse, and strategies to stop this epidemic that is killing our children, friends, and neighbors,” said U.S. Attorney Rod Rosenstein. “We will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to prosecute those who are putting these drugs on our streets, and to build community coalitions to fight this epidemic.”

Every heroin overdose in Maryland is being investigated as a homicide, in an effort to identify the distributor. Together with the Drug Enforcement Agency and the State’s Attorneys of Maryland, the Maryland Attorney General’s Office and the U.S. Attorney’s Office are developing a best practices model on gathering evidence required for criminal prosecution.

The Organized Crime Unit of the Attorney General’s Office has prioritized combatting the heroin epidemic by focusing on dismantling the most dangerous drug organizations across the State. Since its inception in 2015, the Organized Crime Unit has indicted over 50 drug

traffickers – from the traffickers who knowingly distribute fatal doses of heroin – usually cut or mixed with fentanyl – to the violent trafficking organizations that profit off of addicted individuals. The Unit, in coordination with local, state, and federal prosecutors and law enforcement agencies, is currently investigating dozens more and is committed to continuing to aid in the fight against this tragic epidemic.

Many people become addicted to legally prescribed opiates, but switch to heroin, fentanyl or other drugs, when they can no longer obtain their prescription. A 2014 national survey found an estimated 1.4 million people in the U.S. abused a prescription painkiller for the first time that year. Approximately one in five high school seniors reports misusing prescription drugs at least once.

The Maryland Attorney General's Office and U.S. Attorney's Office will continue to work with federal, state and local law enforcement as well as medical and public health authorities, community groups and concerned citizens to develop a coordinated response across all elements of government. Our enforcement efforts are much more effective when they are part of a larger strategy that seeks to educate potential drug users and prevent their involvement with opioids in the first place.