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Franklin County inmates to be offered anti-addiction drug Vivitrol on release

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Starting Oct. 1, inmates released from the Franklin County jail can choose to be injected with Vivitrol, a drug that prevents opioid and alcohol relapses, the newest step taken by a task force to combat an epidemic of overdose deaths.

Up to 520 inmates each year are expected to use naltrexone, sold as Vivitrol, said Kythryn Carr Hurd at a meeting Tuesday of the Franklin County Opiate Task Force. She is the vice president for clinical services at the Alcohol Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County.

“They have to have a substance-use disorder and be willing to continue treatment upon release,” Carr Hurd said.

The goal is to give those who want to recover every tool possible. It’s hoped that those who take the Vivitrol shot will be better prepared to get housing and jobs because they aren’t using drugs.

Immediately prior to the inmates walking out the jail door, Carr Hurd added, “they will receive the injection and be linked immediately to treatment.

“There is a lot of success with Vivitrol.”

The non-addictive drug keeps opioid molecules from connecting to opioid receptors, blocking any possible high.

The Vivitrol program is part of the **task force’s action plan** to combat the plague of heroin and its manmade relatives, which have ravaged Ohio with overdoses and overdose deaths.

Last year, Ohio had **4,050 overdose deaths**, a one-third increase from the year before. Franklin County drug overdose deaths are up 88 percent from a year ago and are on pace to account for 536 overdose deaths this year, 80 percent of them related to heroin, manmade heroin or its relatives.

The Vivitrol program won't be cheap.

The 520 injections for the inmates expected to use the program cost \$769.23 each, or \$400,000 per year. Another \$50,000 per year is expected to be used for medical evaluations and oversight of the program. The money comes mostly from the federal government. The program is planned for the remainder of this year and 2018. Availability of funds will determine whether the program is continued beyond that.

"This is an expensive proposition, but if we're truly going to tackle this problem, we have to do it," Columbus City Council President Zach Klein said at Tuesday's meeting.

"I am very optimistic about addressing the problem ... and I'm typically not an optimistic person. We are serious about this."

The task force was created in March when Franklin County and the city of Columbus combined forces and funding to appoint ADAMH to be the lead agency in its fight against opioids. Klein effectively is the task force's leader.

ADAMH was chosen because it has an \$80 million annual budget that includes \$57 million from a Franklin County property tax. It provides no services, but contracts with agencies to provide them.

That's what it did earlier this summer when it announced it would spend an additional \$5 million to create a 50-bed drug-treatment facility. Local emergency responders have complained there are too few detox beds for further treatment of those they save from overdoses.

The epidemic continues to rage. In Columbus, there are an average of 10 runs per day to administer Narcan, also known as naloxone. It's an opioid-overdose reversal drug that revives overdose victims.

"Narcan saves lives," Klein said. "Now, we have to change lives" with the new programs and

approach.

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