Preventing and Managing Heroin Overdoses.

Several heroin users who are clients of WASUA's NSEP or Outreach Programs have reported sourcing higher purity heroin in Perth over the last two months.

Information received by WASUA leads us to suspect that there has been an increase in Heroin-related deaths in the Perth metro area over the last two months. Whether this is related to an increase in purity or to other factors is as yet unknown.

If you or anyone you know is using heroin, please play safe.

If the gear looks different, or comes from a new source, it's a good idea to try a small amount first as a "tester" to judge the strength.

Remember that overdoses may be caused by a number of different factors other than increases in heroin purity, including:

- using heroin with other depressant drugs, particularly benzodiazepines (sleeping pills) and alcohol
- reduced tolerance to opiates after periods of abstinence,
- using alone, or failure of friends or bystanders to recognise or respond to the signs of overdose.

People die of opiate overdose because it suppresses their breathing.

Signs of overdose may include:

- blue lips and/or fingernails
- becoming difficult to rouse, or showing no response at all
- shallow or uneven breathing
- snoring or gurgling breathing
- not breathing at all
- constricted (or "pin-prick") pupils.

People often die because they are left to "sleep it off". Death often occurs more than an hour after opiate use and in some cases several hours later.

The take home message is don't leave someone alone who is showing these symptoms.

If you think someone may have overdosed, check for a response. If there is no response then call an ambulance (000) and commence CPR immediately. Police do not usually attend when an ambulance is called. If they do, it is to help someone get to hospital, not to "bust" people.

One phone call might just save a life.

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