USING POISON CENTER DATA TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF "BATH SALTS"

THE PROBLEM

In 2013, news outlets reported on dangerous synthetic drugs being sold in gas stations and specialty shops with the label "bath salts" in order to avoid detection by authorities. Wisconsin had already seen a steady increase in opioid-related deaths since 2004 and Department of Health Services (DHS) staff and their partners had been actively responding to this public health problem. The debut of "bath salts" seemed to add fuel to the fire.

Concerned communities requested DHS assist them in finding out if these "bath salts" were linked to increased calls to the Poison Center. Staff were asked to sift through the data and see if "bath salts" were creating additional problems in their specific zip codes.

WHAT MONROE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT DID

Calls to the Wisconsin Poison Center are uploaded daily to the Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking (Wisconsin Tracking) Program's secure portal. Staff queried data using specific zip codes from the concerned communities to see how many calls were made about stimulants and street drugs in the area. The Wisconsin Tracking data revealed calls about stimulants and street drugs had not increased in the area during the time period. The evidence suggested there was no immediate surge in emergency calls that would merit an extraordinary response from the public health system. As such, DHS continued to monitor this situation and work to prevent substance abuse in Wisconsin communities.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

The Poison Center data from Wisconsin Tracking can be a useful tool for local government and law enforcement officials by allowing them to hone in on a particular health issue in a very small geographic area. Data at this granularity can help officials better customize interventions to address public health problems.

Have a question about Poison Center calls in your community?

We can help!

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