



## WEST SIDE HEROIN/OPIOID TASK FORCE

Convened in 2016 by State Representative La Shawn K. Ford, IL-8, and coordinated by Prevention Partnership since July 2019, the Task Force brings together community-based agencies (CBO), governmental entities, health care providers and persons with lived experience to confront the epidemic of opioid overdoses and resultant deaths in Chicago's West Side communities. A key element of the project to date has been the project's communications plan, which is aligned with best practices for public health communications, as described by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

From January 1, 2020 through June 30, 2020, Chicago saw a 61% increase in opioid-related EMS responses and a 55% increase in opioid-related overdose deaths when compared to January 1, 2019 through June 30, 2019. The great majority of these overdoses and resultant deaths occurred on Chicago's West Side communities of Austin, East and West Garfield, and North Lawndale.

The West Side Heroin/Opioid Task Force launched its website with resources, videos, and more. Visit [preventionpartnership.org/westsidetaskforce](http://preventionpartnership.org/westsidetaskforce) to learn more.



Photo from International Overdose Awareness Day. Learn more about the event on our website.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Prevention Partnership launched its new website! Come take a look and see what's changed at [www.preventionpartnership.org](http://www.preventionpartnership.org).



## COVID AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES

By Rosario C. Pesce, PhD, NCSP

Families are adapting to the evolving changes brought on by COVID-19. Parents and other caregivers are faced with helping their families adjust to the constantly changing new normal. This is not an easy task as children and youth need to be kept occupied, feel safe, and attempt to keep up with school work as much as possible. It is important to remember that children look to adults for guidance and how to react to stressful events. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety. It is an opportunity for adults to model problem-solving, flexibility, and compassion. COVID-19 has forced many of us to get creative about how we spend time together, connecting and supporting friends and family members in new ways, and learning how best to process new information from authorities. **Here are some tips you might find helpful.**

### **Stay Calm, Listen, and Offer Assistance.**

Be a role model as children will follow your reactions. Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19. It is important to remind them that you will do everything within your power to keep loved ones safe and well. Explain social distancing. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. Demonstrate deep breathing. Deep breathing is a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Do breathing exercises with your children. Focus on the positive. Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Do family projects, organize belongings, sing, laugh, and go outside. Allow children to connect with friends virtually. Establish and maintain a daily routine. Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control. Identify projects that might help others. This could include writing to neighbors and relatives stuck at home, sending positive messages through social media, reading a favorite book to younger friends over a social media platform. Offer lots of love and affection.

### **Monitor Television Viewing and Social Media..**

Watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase fear and anxiety. Dispel rumors and inaccurate information. Older children may be accessing a great deal of information online from friends that contains inaccuracies. Talk to your child about factual disease information. Provide alternatives. Engage your child in games or other exciting activities.

### **Take Time to Talk.**

Let your children's questions guide you. Answer questions truthfully, but don't offer any unnecessary details or facts. Don't avoid giving them information that experts indicate as crucial to your child's well-being.



## **Be Honest and Accurate.**

Correct misinformation and stay up-to-date on the facts. Go to <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19> and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html> for more information.

## **Keep Explanations Age-Appropriate.**

Early elementary school children require brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Upper elementary and early middle school children are more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe. They may need assistance in separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss efforts that are being made at the national, state and local level to prevent germs from spreading. Upper middle and high school students can benefit from more in-depth discussion about COVID-19. Refer them to appropriate sources for the status of the pandemic. Engage them in decision-making about family plans, scheduling and helping with others at home. For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener.

## **Stay Connected to School.**

Locate learning resources as virtual learning experiences will vary greatly. Take advantage of the many companies and online platforms that currently offer free learning opportunities. Identify any additional resources that are being provided by school such as meals, or technology, such as a tablet, laptop, wi-fi hub, etc. Connect with school staff by reaching out to your child's teacher and other relevant school staff if you have concerns about their coping and keeping up with assignments and activities.

## **Know the Symptoms of COVID-19.**

According to the CDC, symptoms of fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath which appear within 14 days after being exposed to the disease. For some people, the symptoms are similar to having a cold; for others, they are more severe or even life threatening.

## **Model Basic Hygiene and Health Lifestyle Practices.**

Practice daily good hygiene by encouraging children to wash their hands multiple times a day for 20 minutes. Compliment them when they use a tissue or sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow. Handshakes and hugs need to be limited to immediate family members. Help to foster a sense of control by offering guidance on what your child/children can do to prevent infection. This will help reduce anxiety. Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep and stay active. Such activities will help develop a robust immune system to fight off illness.

## **Be Aware of Warning Signs**

Most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members, even if showing signs of some anxiety or concerns such as difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Some children, though, may have risk factors to more intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and self-harm. Risk factors can include pre-existing mental health/behavioral problems, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one. Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than two weeks. [Visit \[preventionpartnership.org/post/covidandfamilies\]\(https://www.preventionpartnership.org/post/covidandfamilies\) for more warning signs.](https://www.preventionpartnership.org/post/covidandfamilies)

Adapted from, Helping Children Cope With Changes Resulting from COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource, National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Nurses, NASP 2020.



## CHICAGO PREVENTION BOWL 2021

Prevention Partnership is pleased to announce that the Chicago Prevention Bowl is scheduled to be held in the fall of 2021. The event is special in that it will exclusively feature teams from Chicago Public Schools, in communities of unmet need throughout the city. The Chicago Prevention Bowl is a fun and interactive competition where students refine their social-emotional skills in a healthy, encouraging environment. Teams of four contest for the coveted 3 foot championship trophy, in addition to PlayStation/Nintendo handheld video game consoles, bikes, gift cards and other cool incentives. In past years, the event has been held at desirable locations such as United Center, Wrigley Field, and Soldier Field, and has benefited from guest appearances from international celebrities such as ABC 20/20 Correspondent Alex Perez, Grammy Award-winning writer and performer GLC, and retired NFL/NBA/MLB players. This will be the 10th Prevention Bowl the agency has proudly hosted. For more information or to sponsor a team, please contact Albert Orsello, Executive Director.

## BOARD SPOTLIGHT: LARRY WILLIAMS



Each quarter Prevention Partnership will recognize a board member or staff member in the newsletter. This quarter, we recognize Larry Williams, chairperson of the board. Larry has been involved with Prevention Partnership since 1984. Read our interview with Larry as he looks back on his time at Prevention Partnership, the challenges of 2020, and why he's passionate about the work being done. Visit [www.preventionpartnership.org/post/spotlight](http://www.preventionpartnership.org/post/spotlight) to read his full interview.

Thanks, Larry for your continued passion and support for the Prevention Partnership mission!