

PORT visits 14 sites seeking answers to overdose surge

CHILLICOTHE - With word of yet another overdose Wednesday afternoon after a reported surge Tuesday, the county's [Post Overdose Response Team](#) visited 14 sites to find out what might be causing those overdoses.



The word of [six overdoses](#) in Chillicothe in less than 24 hours and 15 in Ross County since Sept. 1 sparked a warning from local officials, the third issued in Ross County this year.

Members of PORT spent most of the day Wednesday on the road visiting the homes of overdose victims. Three law enforcement officials and one representative from Safe Haven, the treatment community organization that will serve on the team this month, visited 14 sites and were able to speak with someone at 10 of those locations, according to Chillicothe Police

Detective Bud Lytle.

"We don't normally see this many. It's definitely the largest number of sites the team plans to visit since its inception," said Teri Minney, coordinator of the Heroin Partnership Program.

In a week, Lytle said PORT usually makes about seven to 10 visits. The team was able to contact "quite a few individuals," whether they were victims or family members, during their visits Wednesday, Lytle said.

Minney said officials have been tracking reports in surrounding areas over the last few weeks and, with the knowledge of what volume of overdoses they're seeing, put local officials on alert.

"It's tragic, but not necessarily a major surprise while being consistent with what's being seen," Minney said.

A precedent, however, has not been set with the use of the alert. Minney said officials don't want to put a number on how many reported overdoses triggers an alert to avoid minimizing the tragedy of the situation. Instead, the focus is more on the victims and the type of suspected drug involved.

Minney said officials know the majority of the overdoses were likely caused by heroin, but they are awaiting lab results — which could take weeks to get back — to see what other substances may have been added to the heroin. They can collect and test the drug itself, syringes, or other paraphernalia if it is found at the scene of the overdose, Lytle said.

In the meantime, the PORT visits are an important tool to glean information about what the person who overdosed may have been using and where they might have gotten it.

While talking with people in the homes, Lytle said officials learned two

people who recently overdosed are seeking treatment.

But the biggest objective for the group is to meet people where they are and provide whoever they talk to with information and connect them to service programs.

"Regardless of the number of visits, we don't want to shorten the time we spend with people," Lytle said. "It's unfortunate you have this many in one week, but we're going to continue to try to get them help."

Most often when meeting with a family, Minney said officials see frustration and hope the materials the team provides can help them with coping skills.

With law enforcement and the recovery community working together, Minney thinks it becomes clear that they are collectively working to find a solution. A benefit of the team is that the agencies involved are sharing information and ideas as well as developing relationships that Minney called "fairly untraditional" between the law enforcement and recovery communities.

"These are folks who really have a passion for what they do," Minney said. "They really connect with individuals in community, and families truly see them as a lifeline to support."