



# County of Santa Cruz

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## HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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## Press Release

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**For Release:**    **Immediately**  
**Date:**

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### **COUNTY TO LAUNCH PARAMEDIC BUPRENORPHINE PROGRAM TO COMBAT OPIOID EPIDEMIC**

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY – Santa Cruz County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is pleased to announce the launch of a new program, in partnership with Monterey and San Benito Counties, to expand buprenorphine distribution by emergency responders to reduce opioid overdoses.

“Every day, our EMS providers encounter patients suffering from opioid use disorder, either in overdose or in the throes of withdrawal. Many of these community members do not have access to traditional medical care and often their only encounter with healthcare professionals is through EMS”, said Dr. Lisa Hernandez, Santa Cruz County Health Officer.

For an overdose, Naloxone (Narcan) is a critical lifesaving medication, but does nothing to address the underlying demand for opioids. Buprenorphine helps reduce opioid withdrawal and cravings and, along with methadone, is the most effective treatment for opioid use disorder, reducing the risk of overdose fatalities by up to 50%.

“The opioid epidemic continues to ravage communities across the nation, including Santa Cruz County,” said Dr. David Ghilarducci, Santa Cruz County EMS Medical Director and Deputy Health Officer. “Expanding access to buprenorphine is part of the County’s aim to reduce fentanyl and other drug-related deaths.”

Under this new program, paramedics may administer buprenorphine to certain patients in opioid withdrawal while taking them to a hospital, where they are in turn connected to long term treatment programs. Providing this medication as soon as possible not only relieves withdrawal symptoms but makes successful recovery from addiction more likely. The program began July 13th in Santa Cruz County.

“We are excited that paramedics will have the training and tools necessary to administer buprenorphine in the field,” said Greg Benson, Santa Cruz County EMS Senior Health Services Manager. “By proactively addressing opioid dependence as early as possible, even during a 911 response, we can save lives and connect individuals with addiction to the resources they need to achieve lasting recovery.”

If you or someone you know is interested in treatment services for addiction, please contact your medical provider. If you do not have a medical provider, you can call either Santa Cruz County Substance Use Disorder Services at (800) 952-2335 or SAMHSA’s National 24/7 Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP.

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