FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 21, 2015

CONTACT: Melissa Wade
Public Health Information Officer
412-578-8312
mwade@achd.net

Health Department Director Issues Standing Naloxone Order for Pharmacies
Department Utilizing Act 139 as Tool to Address Heroin Public Health Crisis

PITTSBURGH – Allegheny County Health Department Director Dr. Karen Hacker announced today that she has issued a countywide standing order for naloxone, or Narcan. The standing order allows any licensed pharmacy in the county, which chooses to participate, to dispense naloxone to individuals at risk of a heroin or opioid-related overdose, or those who may witness one.

“Heroin and opioid-related use, overdoses and fatalities are on the rise nationally, and Allegheny County is no exception. This is a public health crisis that we must work cooperatively to address,” said Dr. Hacker. “Act 139 has given us additional tools to do that, and issuing a standing order for naloxone will allow individuals throughout the County to have access to what can be a life-saving antidote. Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that those who are struggling with addiction receive the treatment and recovery supports they need to live a healthy and productive life.”

Act 139 of 2014 allows first responders, including law enforcement, firefighters, EMS and other organizations, the ability to administer naloxone, an opioid reversal medication, to individuals experiencing an opioid overdose. The law also allows individuals such as friends or family members that may be in a position to assist a person at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose to obtain a naloxone prescription. Act 139 provides immunity from prosecution for those responding to and reporting overdoses.

The signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose include a history of current narcotic or opioid use of fentanyl patches on skin or a needle in the body; unresponsiveness or unconsciousness; not breathing or slow/shallow respirations; snoring or gurgling sound (due to partial upper airway obstruction); blue lips and/or nail beds; pinpoint pupils; and clammy skin. Individuals in cardiac arrest from all causes may share many symptoms with someone with a narcotic overdose. If there is no pulse, the person is in cardiac arrest and requires Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an overdose that is caused by an opioid drug (prescription pain medication or heroin). When administered, the naloxone blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and restores breathing within two to eight minutes. It is not a narcotic, and is not addictive. It can be administered in three ways: intranasally, automatic injection and manual injection.

Dr. Hacker’s standing order will apply to intranasal and automatic injection administration, and will allow pharmacies operating under that order to dispense take-home naloxone rescue kits: “These types of administration of naloxone are easy to administer and safe, which is why they are covered by this standing order. This is an evidence-based harm reduction strategy that will save lives.”

For those pharmacies which choose to dispense under Dr. Hacker’s order, an informational pamphlet will be provided for distribution to the recipient of the rescue kit. The pamphlet, which can also be found on
Data provided by the Allegheny County Medical Examiner’s office reflects that there were 299 overdose
deaths in Allegheny County in 2014. Of those, sixty percent of the individuals had heroin in their system. More data on overdoses may be found online at www.overdosefreepa.pitt.edu. The site also provides information and resources for overdose prevention.

Publicly funded substance abuse management services and supports are provided through the Allegheny County Department of Human Services’ Office of Behavioral Health Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services. Those seeking non-emergency drug and alcohol services may call the Bureau, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 412-350-3328. Individuals experiencing a substance use related emergency should immediately call 9-1-1 for assistance.

###

KAREN HACKER, MD, MPH, DIRECTOR  
ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT – PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE  
542 FOURTH AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15219  
PHONE (412) 687-ACHD • FAX (412) 578-8325 • WWW.ACHD.NET