



The information below was provided by the NIDA Blog Team September 25, 2014

<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog>

On October 1, the State of Maryland will put into effect what's called a "Good Samaritan Law," which will protect a person from getting in trouble if they summon aid for someone else who is overdosing on drugs or alcohol. Twenty states and the District of Columbia now have such laws, and more states are considering them - because they save lives.

Many people who overdose on drugs die because the people they are with have also taken drugs and are afraid of getting caught - so they hesitate to dial 911.

Those friends may not just be acting selfishly - they may be unsure of how serious the problem is and, fearing legal trouble, may not be using their best judgment. Second-guessing how much danger an overdosing companion is in can cause a fatal delay in calling for help.

What Friends Are For

The term "Good Samaritan" comes from a parable in the New Testament about a stranger who comes to the aid of a robbed, beaten-up traveler. Good Samaritan laws are passed to remove obstacles to helping others in need, such as calling for medical assistance.

Good Samaritan laws around the country differ on their specifics, but they all provide some degree of protection or immunity from prosecution for a person caught violating a drug law in the context of seeking medical attention.

With the new Maryland law, an overdose victim and any Good Samaritan helping them can't be prosecuted for possessing drugs or drug paraphernalia, or for being intoxicated. (It will not protect someone from being caught selling drugs, though.) For example, if you are a Maryland teenager drinking alcohol with your friend and your friend becomes sick, neither of you will get in trouble if you call for help, even though you are underage.

Do the Right Thing

Many overdose deaths can be prevented. You can overdose on different types of drugs or drug combinations, including alcohol. Lately there's been a lot of attention paid to overdoses from prescription opioids and heroin. Those overdoses are easy to reverse with the injection of a drug called naloxone, which paramedics and many police carry with them for these emergencies. But you have to act fast to prevent a death.

In the past couple years, several people have died after taking "Molly" (or in some cases other drugs they thought was Molly) at different music festivals around the country. Just this August, two young people died of Molly overdoses at the Mad Decent Block Party music festival in Maryland. We don't know if these lives might have been saved if bystanders had called for help sooner - but the new Maryland law will reduce the number of future deaths from drug overdoses at music festivals and anywhere else.

The bottom line is: *Always be a Good Samaritan.* Don't hesitate to call for medical help if you think a friend might be in trouble or overdosing. If you don't know if they're overdosing or not, call 911 - better to be safe than be really sorry later.