Key Findings:
Coronavirus (COVID-19 or 2019-nCoV) is likely to impact the ability of individuals to recover from a drug-related overdose, and may further impact those with substance use disorders by limiting access to treatment and prevention resources.

Details:
Individuals that suffer from substance use disorder are potentially at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19, due to their predisposed issues (e.g. comorbid disorders, associated health complications, and residing in densely populated areas).

- These individuals are also likely to have a greater risk of complications associated with the virus.
- Substances such as opioids, methamphetamine, and alcohol in large quantities, can suppress respiratory function, restrict blood vessels, and aggravate respiratory distress respectively.
  - Smoking and/or vaping illicit substances can further increase the risk of respiratory distress.

Individuals suffering from substance use disorders, who have contracted COVID-19, are also at a greater risk of overdose.

- Due to the respiratory complications caused by the virus, life-saving measures such as CPR or the administration of naloxone may not be as effective if not done in a timely manner.

Implications for New Jersey:

- New Jersey is expected to experience an increase in drug-related incidents.
  - Suspected drug-related deaths are projected to increase 1.5% from February (267 deaths) to March of 2020 (271 projected deaths); they are projected to increase 26% when compared to March of 2019 (215 deaths).
  - Naloxone administrations are projected to increase 0.4% from February (1,122 administrations) to March of 2020 (1,127 projected administrations); they are projected to decrease 1% when compared to March of 2019 (1,143 administrations).
- The demand for treatment services is also expected to increase, despite a predicted decrease in staffing due to social distancing and self-isolation.
  - Hospital space is likely to be limited, and services for substance use disorders may be suspended or temporarily shifted online.
- Due to closures in non-essential businesses or services, such as liquor stores, gyms, and/or outpatient mental health centers, there may be an influx of individuals who are unable to cope with their substance use disorders.
  - Individuals who are dependent on alcohol may experience alcohol withdrawal, which can be fatal.
Individuals who visit the gym or rely on outpatient mental health centers may be unable to manage their substance use disorders due to these closures.

**Recommendations for First Responders**:

To minimize the spread of COVID-19, it is recommended that first responders adhere to the following guidelines:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available and illicit drugs are **NOT** suspected to be present, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
  - Do not touch the face with unwashed hands.
- Have a trained EMS/EMT assess and transport any arrestee who might have COVID-19 to a healthcare facility.
- Ensure only trained personnel wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) have contact with individuals who have or may have COVID-19. The minimum PPE recommended is:
  - A single pair of disposable examination gloves,
  - Disposable isolation gown or single-use/disposable coveralls*,
  - ANY NIOSH-approved particulate respirator (i.e., N-95 or higher),
  - And eye protection (i.e., goggles or disposable face shield).
- For officers who come into close contact with another individual during an arrest, clean and disinfect duty belt and gear prior to reuse using a household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow the standard operation procedures for containment and disposal of used PPE, and for containing and laundering clothes; avoid shaking the clothes.
- **If possible, for those without proper PPE, maintain a distance of at least 6 feet.**

**Source**: NJSP; Drug Monitoring Initiative (DMI) Health & Prevention Sharing Network (HPSN) Public Health Partners

**Source Reliability**: Completely Reliable

**Contributing Agencies**: NJSP

**Dissemination**: Public Safety and Public Health Partners

**Request for Information and Contact Information**: Any agency with additional information regarding this topic, or with any questions about this product, should contact the Drug Monitoring Initiative (DMI), Office of Drug Monitoring & Analysis at DMI@gw.njsp.org.

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