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Drug overdoses spike

Pandemic contributes to surge in deaths and nonfatal overdoses in Volusia-Flagler

By Victoria Villanueva-Marquez
Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

As the coronavirus pandemic has upended lives in Volusia and Flagler counties, another disturbing trend has occurred: Drug overdoses have climbed significantly.

Some experts believe the stress and isolation that has come with the pandemic has contributed to the spike in drug deaths and non-fatal overdoses.

Between March and July, 148 people died from drug overdoses in the two-county area. That's a 54% increase over the 96 drug overdose deaths during the same period in 2019, data from medical examiners' offices shows.

Local healthcare systems also have observed a sharp increase in non-fatal overdoses.

AdventHealth facilities in the two counties have recorded 437 non-fatal overdoses between March and July. That compares to 365 overdose admissions during the same months in 2019. Halifax Health facilities have recorded 228 non-fatal overdoses between March and

July, up from 124 overdose admissions during the same period last year.

Stephen Viel, medical director of emergency services for Halifax Health, said synthetic opioids, namely fentanyl, have caused most of the drug overdoses during the pandemic.

Drug crisis worsens

Several experts said the spike in overdoses suggests the local drug crisis worsened as the coronavirus pandemic pushed drug users farther into isolation. Other experts warn not to jump to conclusions.

See DRUGS, A5



Stephen Viel, medical director of emergency services, stands before the Halifax Health Medical Center in Daytona Beach. The hospital has treated significantly more drug overdose patients during the coronavirus pandemic. [NIGELCOOK]



A student making his way to campus on the first day of school Monday hurries past a welcome back sign at Spruce Creek High School. Those using technology seemed to have the most problems. [DAVID TUCKER]

'Crazy' first day of school in Volusia

As in the last weeks of last year, school during pandemic means tech trouble

By Cassidy Alexander
Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Another first day of school is in the books in Volusia County — but, of course, this one was different.

The coronavirus pandemic means that only about 60% of the district's students were expected to learn in person on Monday. The rest chose virtual school or remote learning, which posed their own sets of challenges.

Parents reported difficulties accessing the district's online platforms. They tried dozens of times to call into its technology



Fifth-grader Brooke Moyer said her first day of remote learning through Volusia Live was "crazy."

[PHOTO PROVIDED]

help line, but couldn't get through. Volusia Online Learning courses weren't available for students to access. And in some

Volusia Live classrooms, it proved difficult for teachers to deal with technology and students at the same time.

"It was crazy," summarized one Volusia Live student.

District spokeswoman Kelly Schulz said there were no widespread technology issues with Volusia Live, the district's brand new platform.

"Everyone we talked to — teachers, parents, students, staff who were on campus — said it went very smooth in the schools today," she said. "Volusia Live went better than expected. And Volusia Online Learning, they have lots of resources dedicated to helping them get up and moving."

Meanwhile, Gov. Ron DeSantis held a round-table event where he and other high-level officials emphasized some of the

See SCHOOL, A2

Did race provide boost to Volusia hotels?

By Jim Abbott
Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

DAYTONA BEACH — With attendance limited in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Coke Zero Sugar 400 in its new August time slot didn't offer the welcome late summer occupancy boost that Volusia County hoteliers had initially anticipated.

Yet, in a summer season marked by occupancy declines tied to the pandemic, the Saturday race still was a welcome dose of something approaching normalcy for hotel managers such as Deborah Bailey, general manager of the 64-room Quality Inn Daytona Speedway, just across the street from Daytona International Speedway.

"I'm happy we at least got to sell out on Saturday and I'm happy that it did not rain this year," Bailey said. "That was good. It was a good race, so the fans got something good out of it."

Because of the pandemic, it's impossible to compare the business generated by the first August running of the Coke Zero with previous races that had become a July 4th holiday tradition for NASCAR fans, Bailey said.

"We were not even close on revenue," Bailey said. "We had a handful of our loyal customers who have been coming to the races for years who stayed for three days. Otherwise, everybody came for Saturday."

"With the social distancing and limited amount of tickets available, you can't even compare it to any other race, much less comparing it to a (previous) Coke Zero," she said. "This is a new way of trying to adapt and look to solutions for getting back to where we were. I'm ecstatically happy there were fans in the seats and the race was able to go on as scheduled."

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