



OFFICE OF THE STATE'S ATTORNEY
MADISON COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Thomas D. Gibbons
State's Attorney

157 North Main Street
Suite 402
Edwardsville, Illinois 62025

Voice: 618 692-6280
Facsimile: 618 296-7001

Contact: Stephanie Smith
618/692-6280

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PRESS RELEASE

Edwardsville—Madison County State's Attorney Thomas D. Gibbons and Coroner Steve Nonn have joined forces to launch ***Lock Your Meds***, a national campaign that encourages adults to closely monitor prescription and over-the-counter medications to keep them out of the hands of teens and young adults.

“Lock Your Meds is about awareness and opening people’s eyes to the fact that legal drugs, in the wrong hands, are just as dangerous as the drugs people buy on the street,” Gibbons said. “Adults need to make sure that they are not becoming accidental dealers by allowing their medications to end up fueling an addiction or even killing someone.”

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) estimates that more than seven million Americans abuse prescription drugs. Of those abusers over the age of 12, it is estimated that 70% obtain the drugs from friends and family members. The DEA estimates more than 4,000 young adults and children have their first experiment with prescription drugs every day.

These alarming statistics, coupled with the search for solutions to the ongoing fight against heroin in Madison County, led Gibbons and Nonn to the ***Lock Your Meds*** campaign. The two have been outspoken on the growing problem of heroin in Madison County, where arrests, prosecutions and overdoses have risen dramatically in the last several years.

In investigating and prosecuting overdose deaths, Gibbons and Nonn found many heroin abusers were also abusers of prescription drugs with multiple types of prescription drugs revealed in toxicology reports of heroin overdose victims. They see the link between prescription drugs and heroin abuse as critical.

“Most heroin users don’t start with heroin,” Gibbons said. “We’re finding that many started with prescription drugs.”

Last year, Nonn’s office investigated 54 drug overdose deaths in Madison County. Of those deaths, 26 were heroin related, 18 were attributed to prescription drug abuse, and the remaining 10 deaths were attributed to other combinations of illicit drugs and alcohol.

“Each of these deaths represent an exponential number of grieving family, friends and loved ones left behind,” Nonn said. “As government officials, it is our duty not only to alert our citizens when a health hazard is present, but to react in a quick and aggressive manner in order to rebuff and resolve

the problem with expediency. Programs like ***Lock Your Meds*** are part of that very process and I am glad to be involved in the project.”

Donna Nahlik, Prevention Specialist Chestnut Health Systems and Chairperson for the Drug Free Coalitions of Madison County, said parents and grandparents need to be proactive in fighting the problem.

“No adult wants to think that it will be their child or grandchild who will abuse or misuse prescription drugs, but research shows us that more than 2,500 youth nationwide start to abuse or misuse prescription drugs every day, Nahlik said. “It is up to us as adults to thwart access to these substances. Locking up medications that you are still using and safely disposing of unwanted or expired medications is a great step to take to keep our kids safe.”

The ***Lock Your Meds*** campaign is sponsored by the same organization that supports National Red Ribbon Week in elementary schools. As part of the ***Lock Your Meds*** message, Gibbons, Nonn, and Madison County Sheriff Bob Hertz will participate in the National Take Back Initiative sponsored by the DEA on Saturday, April 28. Members of the community will be invited to bring any unwanted, expired or unused prescription drugs to a drop-off site to be determined. At a previous event in October 2011, the DEA collected almost 190 tons of medication at more than 5,000 sites nationwide.

Gibbons believes getting out in the community to educate people about these issues and empowering them to help fight the drug problem is key to stopping the rash of overdoses killing teens and adults in Madison County.

“It’s a simple message: be aware, don’t share,” Gibbons said. “You can make a difference and take control of the situation by locking up your meds to keep them out of the wrong hands.”

For more information about permanent prescription drug drop-offs and local events, visit the State’s Attorney website at <http://www.madco-sa.org>.

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