

# Vivitrol successfully used to treat heroin addiction at Washington County Detention Center

by [Dan Dearth](#), Herald Mail, Maine

A groundbreaking partnership between the Washington County Health Department and the Washington County Detention Center is being used with success to treat heroin addiction, according to health and law-enforcement officials.

Rebecca Hogamier, director of behavioral health services at the Washington County Health Department, said health department officials are administering the drug Vivitrol to heroin addicts at the detention center.

“We were the first to do a Vivitrol program in a local detention center in the whole United States,” she said.

The health department received a federal grant in 2010 to administer the drug, which attaches to receptors in the brain, and blocks the euphoria caused by heroin and other opioids.

Forty-four people have received the treatment in Washington County since the program started in July 2011, she said.

A study hasn't been conducted to determine the program's success in more than a year, Hogamier said. But a health department study of 21 people who received Vivitrol from November 2011 to January 2013 showed 92 percent continued treatment after their release from the detention center.

She said the rate was about 50 percent with other treatments.

“That tells you it's pretty ... good,” she said.

Hogamier said inmates who agree to the treatment must wait 10 days so they can finish going through withdrawal. After that 10-day period, a nurse gives the drug user an injection of Vivitrol in the buttocks, she said. The drug's effects last for a month until the next application.

She said the monthly injections make it easier for addicts to manage, compared to a medication that requires a daily dosage, such as methadone.

“This medication seems to put those issues to rest because it's a monthly injection,” she said. “You don't have to wake up and remember to take your medication. It's already in your body.”

Hogamier said Vivitrol varies in cost.

In some cases, one injection can cost up to \$1,200, she said. But the health department buys the drug through a state contract, which allows the organization to reduce the cost to \$523 per injection.

She said the amount people pay for the injection depends on their income. In many cases, private insurance picks up the cost, she said, because the injection is cheaper than visits to the emergency room.

Hogamier said addicts sometimes try to “override” the Vivitrol in their systems by injecting larger amounts of heroin to get high. In those cases, she said, an overdose might occur.

She said an addict doesn’t have to be an inmate at the detention center to receive Vivitrol. Anyone can visit the health department and request the treatment.

Those wishing to receive the treatment have to pass an assessment, which includes a blood test, before being given the drug.

She said that although Vivitrol is effective, it doesn’t always work.

“It’s not the cure-all,” she said. “But it’s another tool in the tool bag.”

The Washington County Health Department may be reached at 240-313-3200.

*Dan Dearth is a reporter for The Herald-Mail. He can be reached via email at [dan.dearth@herald-mail.com](mailto:dan.dearth@herald-mail.com).*