



Health Advisory

Fentanyl-laced Heroin

February 2014

Recent news reports have linked the marked increase in recent deaths since the beginning of this year to the use of heroin contaminated with the drug fentanyl.

Fentanyl is a synthetic form of opioid that is 50 times more potent than morphine or heroin. When used in combination with heroin, it can cause severe injury and even death. Currently, the source of this substance is unknown.

Preventing Overdoses

People using heroin or cocaine, or in treatment/recovery from such use need to know that:

- One may not know that the heroin or cocaine has been cut with fentanyl
- Because the potency of the drug purchased on the street is not known, and because the inclusion of fentanyl may not be disclosed, ANY use – even a reduced dose – can result in overdose or death
- The effects of an overdose occur rapidly, particularly with this potent combination of drugs. Critical treatment minutes can be lost because emergency room personnel may not be aware that fentanyl is not detected in standard toxicology screens.

How do I recognize signs of an opioid overdose?

- The person can't be woken up
- Breathing is very slow or not existent
- Lips or nails may seem blue

What should I do if I see an overdose?

- Call 911 immediately
- Say "I think someone may have overdose."
- If the person isn't breathing, do rescue (mouth-to-mouth) breathing by pinching the nose and blowing into the mouth
- Administer naloxone (Narcan) if you have it
- Lay the person on their side once they have resumed breathing
- Stay with the overdosed person until the ambulance arrives

Getting Treatment

Health officials urge people dealing with heroin or other opioid problems to get treatment. Medication assisted treatment using FDA-approved treatments such as methadone, buprenorphine and extended release naltrexone can effectively treat heroin/opioid addictions and enable people to recover to healthy, productive lives. Those seeking treatment can find help by calling 800-662-HELP (4357) or online at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/index.aspx>.

More information

The Connecticut Department of Public Health will continue its surveillance and periodic updates as more information is available. Additional information about opioids is available at http://poisoncontrol.uchc.edu/about_poisons/medications/opioids/index.html.