



DATE: February 28, 2014

TO: Hospitals, EMS Providers/Organizations, Community Health Centers, Local Health Departments

RE: Fentanyl-laced Heroin

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. Currently, the source of this substance is unknown.

The mixture of heroin and fentanyl produces an extremely potent opioid effect including coma and respiratory depression that can overcome the tolerance of chronic opioid abusers. Please exercise increased vigilance in promptly identifying suspected overdose patients and taking appropriate action.

Signs and symptoms of fentanyl overdose are consistent with opioid overdose and include unconsciousness or unresponsiveness; respiratory depression or arrest; cyanosis; vomiting; and pinpoint pupils.

Please note the following recommendations:

- Patients with a known history of drug abuse should be warned of the potential danger of the use of these drugs, regardless of their tolerance, and encouraged to seek detoxification and rehabilitation services.
- Associates of drug users should be encouraged to activate EMS immediately upon identification of a possible overdose and provide rescue breathing when appropriate without fear of legal repercussions.
- Pre-hospital and emergency providers should follow pre-established protocols when managing opioid related toxicity, including the use of assisted ventilation and administration of naloxone as indicated.
- Larger doses of naloxone than typically expected may be required. No unusual or additional toxicity is anticipated, but the severity of toxicity is expected to be increased.
- Prescribe Naloxone (Narcan®) to all opiate users so that it is immediately available if an overdose occurs. Additional information on prescribing naloxone is at <http://prescribetoprevent.org/>

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.