

Health Advisory: Drug Overdose Deaths Linked to Carfentanil

Minnesota Department of Health Mar 31, 2017 12:00 CDT

Action Steps:

Local and tribal health departments: Please forward to hospitals, clinics, emergency departments, urgent care centers, and convenience clinics.

Hospitals and clinics: Please distribute to health care providers in these facilities who might treat patients with symptoms of drug overdoses.

Health care providers:

- Follow your established overdose protocols, rescue breathing, and administer naloxone through whatever route available. Intranasal is just as effective as intramuscular. Nationwide reports suggest the need to assess for higher or repeated naloxone doses.
- Report suspect or confirmed cases of poisoning by drugs or other toxic agents within 24 hours to the Minnesota Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Background

On March 28, 2017, a toxicology laboratory confirmed five Minnesota deaths due to the synthetic opioid, carfentanil. Carfentanil is an extremely potent opioid (approximately 100 times more potent than fentanyl and 10,000 times more potent than morphine). It can be found in powder, blotter paper, tablets or spray form. It often resembles powdered cocaine or heroin. This is a new phenomenon in our state.

On August 25, 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a Health Alert Network (HAN) update describing recent increases in the confiscation and availability of counterfeit pills (e.g., labeled as Oxycodone, Xanax and Norco). These pills contain varying amounts of fentanyl and fentanyl-related compounds. In addition, the CDC reports increasing incidents of these toxic compounds being mixed with or sold as heroin and other illicit drugs.

Clinical Presentation

Carfentanil toxicity presents in a similar way to other opioid overdoses, though the onset tends to be more severe and the episode more prolonged. Signs and symptoms of fentanyl-related overdoses include: altered mental status, loss of consciousness, pinpoint pupils, respiratory depression, slowed or erratic heart rate, nausea/vomiting, muscle spasms, cold, clammy skin, skin color changes, seizures, death. Special confirmatory tests are available for fentanyl and carfentanil but standard urine and drug toxicology screens are unable to detect these substances.

Patient Education

Advise not using drugs alone; inform patients there is an increased risk of overdose due to the broader distribution of illicit drugs containing fentanyl and carfentanil; recommend that patients participate in overdose prevention education at a local harm reduction program; or refer them to a pharmacy to get naloxone for overdose reversal. Minnesota Poison Control can talk anyone through administering naloxone and is reachable 24/7 at 1-800-222-1222.

- **Additional Information**

Local DEA issued an Officer Safety Alert this past September: [DEA Issues Carfentanil Warning to Police and Public \(https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2016/hq092216.shtml\)](https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2016/hq092216.shtml)

- CDC Health Update: [Influx of Fentanyl-laced Counterfeit Pills and Toxic Fentanyl-related Compounds Further Increases Risk of Fentanyl-related Overdose and Fatalities](https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00395.asp)
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Questions or concerns

For other questions or concerns on drug toxicity, overdose or any suspected poisoning, intoxication, inhalation or ingestion, call the Minnesota Poison Control Center 24/7 at 1-800-222-1222.

A copy of this HAN is available at www.health.state.mn.us/han/ .

The content of this message is intended for public health and health care personnel and response partners who have a need to know the information to perform their duties.