



Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services

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Fentanyl Alert

Substance abuse treatment providers, harm reduction programs and opioid overdose programs and their responders should be aware that New York State's heroin crisis is worsening with the presence of fentanyl in the illicit drug market. This alert is jointly issued by the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services and the New York State Department of Health to underscore the serious concerns we all have about the impact that this drug is having on New Yorkers.

Fentanyl has been identified in the illicit drug market throughout New York State, as well as in neighboring states and Canadian provinces. While strengths of street drugs are hard to compare, it is known that pharmaceutical fentanyl is 100 times more potent than morphine.

Fentanyl or one of its various analogs can be mixed with heroin or sold as heroin. Because of this, it may be far more potent than buyers may realize. Fentanyl is being illicitly produced in pill form and sold as a variety of prescription drugs. It may also be mixed with cocaine. An overdose involving fentanyl can be reversed with naloxone, however multiple doses may be necessary. When an opioid overdose is encountered call 911 immediately.

Responders should be aware that fentanyl can cause a little known side effect of chest wall rigidity in which the person who has used the drug cannot move his or her chest wall to breathe even though he or she might be conscious and trying to do so. Naloxone and possibly other medical interventions are necessary to address this life-threatening situation.

Individuals trained in overdose prevention should:

1. Periodically review the overdose response instructions in their kits so they are ready to respond appropriately if they encounter an opioid overdose.
2. Ensure that they have ready access to their overdose kit containing two doses of naloxone.
3. Administer naloxone as soon as possible in cases of a suspected opioid overdose.
4. Call 911.
5. Stay with the overdosed individual until EMS arrives. The individual needs to be evaluated in a hospital emergency room as additional naloxone or other medical support may be required.
6. Be prepared to use a second dose of naloxone if the first dose does not appear to be effective in three minutes.

Individuals who are themselves at risk for opioid overdose from street drugs and not yet ready or able to stop should be encouraged to:

1. To the extent possible, avoid using drugs alone.
2. Become trained overdose responders.
3. Recognize that even a familiar dealer may provide drugs that contain fentanyl.
4. Be very cautious about the potential strength and lethality of all drugs. A "test shot" or preliminary ingestion of a small quantity of a substance, is no guarantee that the rest of what one has acquired is safe.
5. Inform their drug dealers if they have a bad reaction to a drug.
6. Let others know of the dangers of fentanyl.

Providers that have not yet registered with the New York State Department of Health as an opioid overdose program are encouraged to do so. The registration form and other helpful information is available at <http://www.health.ny.gov/overdose>. For a listing of naloxone trainings available at NYS OASAS Addiction Treatment Centers, visit this link: <http://www.oasas.ny.gov/atc/ATCherointraining.cfm>.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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