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## **Advisory: Fentanyl-laced heroin**

3/21/2016

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The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention issued an advisory in October 2015 concerning reported increases in fentanyl-related unintentional overdose fatalities, which have risen because of the particularly lethal, long-acting nature of this drug.

The full advisory can be viewed here: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00384.asp>

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Over the past decade, heroin use and opioid overdose have increased dramatically in all regions of the country, with the greatest increase seen in the Midwest.<sup>1-5</sup> Nationally, from 2011-2013, heroin involved overdose deaths have almost doubled.<sup>6</sup> Recent studies show that nearly half of young people who inject heroin reported abusing prescription opioids before starting to use heroin. Some individuals reported switching to heroin because it is cheaper and easier to obtain than prescription opioids.<sup>7-9</sup>

Heroin is sometimes mixed with other drugs and often laced with fentanyl. Fentanyl (non-pharmaceutical fentanyl or NPF) is a potent opioid analgesic that can be mixed with heroin and/or cocaine as a combination product to increase euphoric effect; the addition of NPF can occur with or without the knowledge of the user.

There has been an 80% increase in deaths where fentanyl or its analog acetyl-fentanyl is present. There has also been a significant increase in fentanyl drug confiscations since 2012; approximately 80% of fentanyl seizures in 2014 were concentrated in 10 states.<sup>10</sup>

2015-16 data from Dane County Emergency Medical Service providers indicate increases in naloxone administrations along with increased dose required for resuscitation, suggesting fentanyl may be present in local heroin supply. Naloxone is a medication used to resuscitate individuals after an opioid overdose and its availability has expanded in response to the increase in death rates due to overdose. It has also been made available to individuals in Dane County. See: [http://www.safercommunity.net/parent\\_addiction\\_network.php](http://www.safercommunity.net/parent_addiction_network.php).

It remains unclear the extent to which fentanyl plays a role in the increases in naloxone administration by Dane County emergency responders, but the presence of fentanyl in overdose forensic reports has been documented in large metropolitan cities in the Midwest.

CDC recommendations outlined by the advisory for public health departments, medical and health professionals, and law enforcement are important to understand. Key recommendations include:

- 1) improving detection of overdose outbreaks involving fentanyl and/or other opioids via improved communication and data sharing between stakeholders, and
- 2) the expanded use of Naloxone (e.g. Narcan, Evzio).<sup>10</sup>

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#### References

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