

September 28, 2016

Influx of illicitly manufactured fentanyl increases risk of fentanyl-related overdose and fatalities

Actions Requested

- **Understand that multiple doses of naloxone may be needed per overdose event because of fentanyl's increased potency relative to other opioids.** Orally-ingested counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl may require prolonged dosing of naloxone in the Emergency Department/hospital setting due to a delayed toxicity that has been reported in some cases.
- **Be aware that counterfeit drugs may look identical** to narcotic and benzodiazepine medications, but contain fentanyl.
- **Use extreme caution when handling suspected illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF), white powders, and unknown substances.** Fentanyl can be absorbed through the skin or via inhalation.
- **Do not perform field testing on compounds if fentanyl is suspected—lab testing should be expedited.**
- **Expand naloxone access** to persons at risk for opioid-related overdose.
- **Discuss substance use disorder treatment options** with persons who have experienced an opioid-related overdose once they are stabilized.

For questions, please contact our Communicable Disease staff at 360-337-5235.

Background

Earlier this year, Snohomish County and Seattle law enforcement officers confiscated fentanyl-laced heroin and counterfeit narcotics containing fentanyl. The Kitsap County Coroner's office has provided data indicating that there were four deaths in 2015 associated with fentanyl in Kitsap County, indicating that this illicit drug is present in Kitsap County. Thus, it is important for medical providers, law enforcement and other first responders, and coroners to be alert for signs of fentanyl overdose, to protect themselves from exposure to even tiny amounts of the drug, and to be prepared for overdose situations that may require multiple doses of naloxone.

In August, 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a Health Alert Network (HAN) Health Advisory warning about the influx of fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills and toxic fentanyl-related compounds. In July 2016, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) issued a nationwide report indicating that hundreds of thousands of counterfeit pills have been entering the U.S. drug market since 2014, some containing deadly amounts of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs. The influx of counterfeit pills, which closely resemble oxycodone, Xanax, and Norco, has increased the chance of fentanyl-involved overdoses among persons misusing prescription opioids or benzodiazepines who seek diverted medications on the illicit market, in addition to persons who inject, sniff, or snort drugs. Persons who misuse prescription pills are geographically widespread; thus, the potential risk for fentanyl overdose has spread beyond those regions previously known to be impacted by IMF, and could intensify the impact in regions already affected by IMF. Heroin may be laced with fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs, exposing user and response personnel to hidden risk, and possibly requiring additional doses of naloxone for successful overdose rescue.

Resources

- (1) CDC Health Update: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00395.asp>
- (2) DEA Warning to Police and Public: <https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2016/hq061016.shtml>
- (3) Ostrich Bay Needle Exchange Hours & Contact Number: <http://www.peoplesharmreductionalliance.org/hours>
- (4) Kitsap County Certified Alcohol and Drug Treatment Agencies: http://www.kitsappublichealth.org/healthcare/files/Kitsap_Treatment_List.pdf