

To: Overdose Prevention Community

From: Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration

Subject: Notification on Fentanyl Overdose

Date: January 31, 2014

Rhode Island and Pennsylvania have seen a significant increase in drug overdose deaths so far this year, as compared to the same time frame in 2013, and the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) reports a similar pattern in our state.

Many of these overdoses involved fentanyl, an opioid many times stronger than heroin. Pharmaceutical fentanyl is typically used in the treatment of severe, chronic pain (often related to cancer) and is available in multiple formulations (transdermal patch, lozenge, sublingual tablet). However, the fentanyl involved in many of these deaths is packaged in powder form in combination with heroin or cocaine, indicating the possibility of illicit manufacture rather than diversion from the healthcare system. The combination may be sold to the user as a strong version of heroin. As the person using the drug is unaware of its potency, overdose is a heightened risk.

According to data from the Maryland OCME, between September 2013 and today, 37 Maryland deaths have been reported due to the lethal drug combination. More than 22 have died in Rhode Island and at least 17 in Pennsylvania over the past three weeks.

Pennsylvania and Rhode Island are applying collaborative efforts among county health department officials, the medical examiner, emergency response teams, law enforcement, and local harm reduction organizations to effectively address this public health crisis. The Drug Enforcement Administration is investigating the source of the fentanyl-tainted drugs.

The purpose of this memo is to bring your attention to this situation and acknowledge that Maryland is seeing a similar pattern of drug overdose. If you have any information from your jurisdiction - such as overdose revivals by Emergency Medical Services personnel or drug seizures by law enforcement - that involved fentanyl, the overdose prevention team at the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration is tracking these reports. Please contact Erin Haas, 401-402-8574 or erin.haas@maryland.gov, with any information, questions, or concerns. We are working to stay informed on the issue as it plays out in Maryland and nationwide and will provide critical updates as they become available.

This crisis is a reminder of the overall challenge to reduce overdose deaths in Maryland. We encourage treatment programs to incorporate overdose prevention training into intake and discharge protocols. Attached is an information card that can be used to notify people on how to prevent overdose and what to do if they encounter an overdose situation. It is important that

people 1) call 911, 2) perform rescue breathing until help arrives, and 3) administer naloxone (Narcan®) when available.

Check for updates on the rollout of Maryland's Overdose Response Program to train and certify individuals to administer naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses at <http://adaa.dhmh.maryland.gov/SitePages/Naloxone.aspx>.

Sources:

<http://wesa.fm/post/allegheeny-co-trying-prevent-further-heroin-overdoses-after-rash-deaths>.

<http://www.post-gazette.com/local/crime/2014/01/27/Allegheny-County-police-continue-heroin-overdose-investigation/stories/201401270126>

<http://triblive.com/neighborhoods/yourallekiskivalley/yourallekiskivalleymore/5491999-74/heroin-treatment-overdose>

<http://www.drugfree.org/join-together/community-related/dea-joins-investigation-into-source-of-deadly-heroin-that-killed-22>