

OCT 9, 2015

Dear Colleague,

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is alerting the prevention, treatment, recovery, and other sectors of the public health community along with the general public that, as of October 7, 2015, the Chicago area has experienced 82 overdose cases and seven deaths reportedly linked to the use of heroin which may have been contaminated with the drug fentanyl. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opiate analgesic similar to, but more potent than, morphine. When used in combination with heroin, fentanyl can rapidly cause severe injury and even death.

It has been observed that these trends can quickly expand to larger and more distant geographic areas of the country. The origin of fentanyl is unknown at this time, but overdose cases involving heroin and fentanyl have also been reported in Ohio and Massachusetts. Local, state, and federal agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Drug Enforcement Administration, are closely monitoring these trends.

Heroin is an extremely dangerous drug because it subjects its users to a wide array of risks such as overdose and increased exposure to hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, and other infectious diseases. It often contains other unknown ingredients which render it even more potentially harmful.

SAMHSA requests prevention and treatment providers to advise their patients and community stakeholders to be alert to the increased risk of overdose associated with heroin use. SAMHSA's Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit contains information on recognizing and responding appropriately to opioid overdose, including the use of naloxone, which can effectively reverse an opioid overdose. The Toolkit is available at <http://www.store.samhsa.gov/product/Opioid-Overdose-Prevention-Toolkit/SMA13-4742>

Counseling and behavioral therapies, together with Food Drug Administration-approved medications such as methadone and buprenorphine are effective pharmacotherapies for the treatment of opioid use disorder; naltrexone, including oral and injectable extended release formulations, is an effective medication for preventing relapse to opioid use. These medications can enable people to recover to healthy, productive lives. Comprehensive programming, inclusive of prevention, treatment and recovery services, remain the best method for preventing fatal overdoses and other risks.

Those seeking treatment for opioid dependence can find help through SAMHSA's Treatment Locator at: 800-662-HELP (4357) or online at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/index.aspx>.

Please contact Melinda Campopiano, M.D., at 240-276-2701 or melinda.campopiano@samhsa.hhs.gov with questions or for further information.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kade", written over a faint horizontal line.

Daryl W. Kade
Acting Director
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment