



STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Coming Tower

The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza

Albany, New York 12237

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr.P.H.
Commissioner

Dennis P. Whalen
Executive Deputy Commissioner

August 2006

Dear Colleague:

Drug overdose is a serious public health concern. We are writing to ask for your help in preventing accidental deaths due to opioid-related overdoses. Since 1990, there has been a significant increase in deaths due to accidental drug poisoning across the United States. The largest increase among such poisonings is among the opioid category of drugs, including heroin, morphine, codeine, methadone, oxycodone (Oxycontin, Percodan, Percocet), hydrocodone (Vicodin), fentanyl (Duragesic), and hydromorphone (Dilaudid). This change has accompanied a dramatic increase in prescriptions for opioids for pain management. A 2005 survey revealed that 19% of U.S. teenagers, roughly 4.5 million, reported having taken prescription painkillers to get high.

Recent news reports have highlighted the dangers of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid at least 50 times more potent than morphine or heroin. The combination of illicitly manufactured fentanyl with heroin is believed to be the cause of recent outbreaks of overdose deaths reported nationally, including, to date this year, 16 fentanyl-related deaths in New York City (NYC) and 13 outside of NYC for a statewide total of 29. We encourage your review of the variety of print and other materials about fentanyl, including fact sheets, that are freely available on the Internet as outlined in the enclosed Resource Sheet.

Overdose is a preventable cause of death in the majority of cases involving opioids. Prevention measures include education on risk, overdose recognition and appropriate response (e.g., contacting emergency medical services, resuscitation/rescue breathing, and/or administration of naloxone, an FDA approved opioid antagonist). Opioid overdose prevention programs can also provide training for individuals to reverse potentially fatal overdoses. You may obtain information about opioid overdose prevention programs from the New York State Department of Health at:

http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/opioidprevention/index.htm.

We urge you to consider including information about preventing opioid-related overdoses in your programs and services.

Sincerely,

Guthrie S. Birkhead, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, AIDS Institute
NYS Department of Health

Steven S. Kipnis, M.D., FACP, FASAM
Medical Director
NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services

Attachment

Resource Sheet: Fentanyl

New York State and City Agencies

NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services

- Drugs of Abuse: Fentanyl
<http://www.oasas.state.ny.us/AdMed/drugs/fentanyl.cfm>
- OASAS Provider Training Home Page
<http://www.oasas.state.ny.us/workforce/training/index.cfm>

NYS Department of Health

- Opioid Overdose Prevention Web Page
http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/opioidprevention/index.htm
- Dear Nursing Home Administrator - Fentanyl Alert
http://www.health.state.ny.us/professionals/nursing_home_administrator/fentanyl_ltr.htm

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH)

- Physician Alert: 2006 Advisory #24: Fentanyl-related overdose deaths in New York City
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cd/06md24.pdf>
- Health Alert #24: Fentanyl-Related OD Deaths in NYC
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cd/06md24.pdf>
- Health Alert #17: Overdoses Related to Ingestion of Fentanyl-heroin or Fentanyl-Cocaine Mixture
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cd/06md17.pdf>
- Heroin Abuse and Addiction
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/basas/heroin.shtml>

Federal Agencies

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

- Drug Information: Fentanyl
http://www.samhsa.gov/drugalerts/fentanyl_july06.aspx
- Fact Sheet & Letter from SAMHSA CSAT Director H. Westley Clark (pdf)
<http://www.dpt.samhsa.gov/pdf/Fentanyl-heroin-letter-fact-sheet.pdf>

National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA)

- NIDA Fentanyl Information
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugpages/fentanyl.html>

- Message from NIDA Director Dr. Nora D. Volkow
<http://www.nida.nih.gov/about/welcome/messagefentanyl606.html>

U.S. Department of Justice National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC)

- Fentanyl Situation Report from the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), June 5, 2006
<http://www.usdoj.gov/ndic/srs/20469/index.htm>

Drug Enforcement Agency

- DEA Microgram Bulletin Intelligence Alert, March 2006
<http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/programs/forensicsci/microgram/mg0306/mg0306.html>

Food and Drug Administration

- FDA ALERT [7/2005]: Narcotic Overdose and Death
- Patient Information
- Health Care Provider Information
- Public Health Advisory
- FDA Statement
- MedWatch Alert (7/8/2005)
- Regulatory History of Fentanyl from Drugs@FDA
- Report Adverse Events to MedWatch
<http://www.fda.gov/CDER/drug/infopage/fentanyl/default.htm>

Information from Other States

The University of Maryland's Center for Substance Abuse Research

- CESAR FAX, Fentanyl Linked to Recent Clusters of Drug Overdoses and Deaths in U.S. July 10, 2006
<http://www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/cesarfax/vol15/15-27.pdf>

Ohio Early Warning Network

- Alert #20, May 26, 2006
<http://www.ebasedprevention.org/oewn.asp?id=2843>