

August 30, 2016

Attention: Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Hospitals: Emergency Rooms and Infection Control, Walk-In Clinics, Correctional Facilities

RE: BOOTLEG FENTANYLS IN ONTARIO'S ILICIT DRUG SUPPLY

Communities across Ontario are increasingly reporting the **presence of 'bootleg' fentanyl in local illicit drug markets in both pill and powder formulations. Bootleg fentanyl is high-dose, illicit opioids much more toxic than morphine**, produced and distributed by the black market and distinct from pharmaceutically produced fentanyl patches.

In Ontario, bootleg fentanyl has been detected in heroin and cocaine, as powder and as counterfeit pills manufactured to resemble prescription opioids such as Percocet, Oxycontin 80mg etc. Unconfirmed reports suggest the bootleg fentanyl may also be present in crystal methamphetamine and ecstasy (MDMA). Additionally, substances such as U-47700, AH-7921 and W-18 have been detected in Ontario. These substances are often ordered online, shipped from China, consumed or repackaged and trafficked.

Bootleg fentanyl has driven overdose fatalities up 4,500% in Alberta (2011-2015). British Columbia has declared a public health overdose emergency as record-setting overdose deaths due primarily to bootleg fentanyl have surged 74% over the same period last year (January to July). All U.S. states bordering Ontario are reporting a significant spike in fentanyl-detected deaths. Ontario overdose fatality data for 2016 are not expected until late 2017 or 2018, however 2016 has thus far been a record-breaking year for both overdose alerts, and for seizures of bootleg fentanyl by Ontario's enforcement agencies.

The **presence of bootleg fentanyl and other substances is a threat for fatal poisoning to people who use substances occasionally or daily**. Many if not most consumers will be unaware of fentanyl's presence. No conventional field tests exist for the fentanyl and they cannot be detected by sight, smell or taste. The **bootleg fentanyl may have health and safety implications for first responders, hospital staff and others given the potential for exposure via skin contact or accidental inhalation. More than two naloxone doses (0.4mg/mL) may be required to revive a victim**. Where naloxone programs exist, limitations on the number of doses dispensed should be reconsidered. More than 4,000 people have died of an opioid-related overdose between 2000 and 2013. In 2014, a person died of an opioid-related overdose every 13 hours, exceeding deaths on Ontario's roadways. The bootleg fentanyl and other novel substances add a new level of urgency to Ontario's chronic opioid crisis.

We encourage service providers and others to be aware and modify services as necessary. Naloxone kits are available locally for FREE, for those at risk. Call PARN at 1-800-361-2895.

For more information, contact:

1. Krista Skutovich 1-866-888-4577 ext. 1334
2. Shawn Woods 1-866-888-4577 ext. 1290

Tips for Service Providers*

Bootleg fentanyl may be in pills, heroin, cocaine, crystal meth etc.

You **can't** see it, smell it, taste it or test for it.

There is a risk of an opioid overdose, even if you are not knowingly using opioids.

Higher doses of naloxone may be required to revive the victim.

Advise those clients who may use drugs:

Do not use alone.

Start with a small amount.

Watch and wait before the next person uses.

Have naloxone ready.

An opioid overdose is a medical emergency: Call 911. Administer naloxone. Assist victim.

* A free printable 8.5 x 14 poster is available at www.drugstrategy.ca