SAFETY NEWSLETTER

MCWCF
MICHIGAN COUNTIES WORKERS' COMPENSATION FUND

SELF INSURED WORKER'S COMPENSATION FUND MEMBERS | June 2017

EMS, Police, Hospitals and Fire Fear the Lethal Heroin Cocktail Carfentanil and Fentanyl

The Michigan State Police released a bulletin to alert

EMS workers and other responders of carfentanil, which is being found mixed with heroin to form a drug cocktail that is causing hundreds of overdoses across the country. The drug recently made its way to Kent County in west Michigan, so MSP alerted first responders across the state to its harmful effects.
Kenneth Cummings, president and CEO of Tri-Hospital EMS, said carfentanil is about 10,000 times more potent than morphine, and is generally used as a sedative for very large animals, such as elephants. Because of that potency, the drug can be absorbed through the skin or accidentally inhaled, making it dangerous for those who come into contact with it, and even more for those who use it.
"Once you've been exposed you have a very limited amount of time to react to it," Cummings said. "Symptoms vary from person to person, but loss of consciousness is very rapid. Disorientation, coughing and then eventually cardiac arrest."
Carfentenil is a Schedule II drug, meaning it has a high potential for abuse and addiction. People and animals, like police dogs, might absorb carfentanil via skin contact, inhalation, oral exposure or ingestion. Since July, it has caused overdoses in Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.
First responders are requested to take extra precautions when called to overdoses, as the substance does not look different from heroin to the naked eye, so they might not know it's there, Cummings said. EMS workers have always taken these precautions, including wearing gloves, but they also have gowns which cover any exposed skin and might now be seen with a face mask or respirator.

The real danger in this is if a responder or a family member were to come in contact with this potent drug, the onset is extremely rapid," he said. "Because of the level of strength, the antidote needed, which in most places would be Narcan, is going to be beyond what most agencies are carrying. That's a concern, especially for patients. Narcan, or naxolone, has been used for about 50 years to counteract overdose symptoms and is carried by first responders in St. Clair County. In 2015, it was administered 320 times, almost an overdose every day, Cummings said. The numbers have not increased this year, but what responders are seeing instead are more serious overdoses. "We would usually encounter someone who was drowsy but still awake," Cummings said. "We were able to treat them. Today we're encountering many that are completely unconscious or in cardiac arrest." Port Huron Fire Operations Chief Dan Mainguy said fire departments received the notice from MSP as well, and are continuing to follow established protocols for responding to overdoses, which happen "frequently." Like Cummings said, responders do not know if carfentanil has been ingested by a patient until substances are tested in a lab.

In 2011, the St. Clair County Medical Examiner's office listed 15 heroin-related deaths; in 2012, 3; in 2013, 13; and in 2014, 34. Heroin-related deaths for 2015 and 2016 were not immediately available.

evidence collection process.

Timothy K. McGuire
MCWCF Administrator
mcguire@micounties.org

800-258-1152
WWW.MICOUNTIES.ORG

AJ Hale
CompOne Risk Mngt Services
ajhale@compone.net

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Recommendations for First Responders

Fentanyl-related substances are designed to be absorbed into the body by all means, including injection, oral ingestion, contact with mucous membranes, inhalation, and via transdermal transmission (through the skin). As such, accidental exposure by first responders is a real danger. Accidental exposure can occur under a number of circumstances, including during the execution of search or arrest warrants, the purchase of fentanyl during undercover operations, the processing of drug evidence containing fentanyl or fentanyl-related substances, or the processing of non-drug evidence (e.g., drug proceeds, pill presses, scales, or drug paraphernalia) which may be contaminated with these substances.

Due to the high potency of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances, exposure to small quantities can cause serious negative health effects, respiratory depression, and even death. However, fentanyl can be handled safely with proper training and equipment to include hazard recognition and use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Police dogs are also at risk of serious health effects from exposure to fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances.

PPE DEFINED:

PPE:	Personal Protective Equipment
Personal PPE:	Nitrile gloves, safety glasses, N-95 dust mask, disposable paper suit or coveralls, shoe covers
Level C PPE:	Chemical resistant suit, air purifying respirator, gloves, booties
Level B PPE:	Chemical resistant suit, self-contained breathing apparatus, gloves, and boots.
Level A PPE:	Level "A" suit and a self-contained breathing apparatus

General Safety Recommendations

Due to the hazardous nature of the synthetic opioids described in this overview, law enforcement personnel, or any first responders, who encounter fentanyl or fentanyl-related substances should NOT take samples or otherwise disturb any powdered substances without employing proper PPE as this could lead to accidental exposure. Further, it is possible that illicit fentanyl or fentanyl-related substances could be mixed with other drugs or concealed in innocuous devices (such as nasal spray or eye dropper bottles) in varying amounts and purities, thus causing unintentional exposure.
Law enforcement personnel, as well as first responders, should exercise appropriate safety precautions at all times when fentanyl or fentanyl-related substances are suspected.

If the presence of fentanyl or any synthetic opioid is suspected, personnel should immediately contact the appropriate officials within their agency who have been trained to handle hazardous materials, or contact the nearest DEA field office for assistance. Having specially trained law enforcement (or hazardous materials "HAZMAT" incident response team) professionals equipped with the necessary equipment, to include Level "A" PPE, on-site to assess the situation prior to exposure or contamination is recommended. This includes situations involving unknown powdered substances and/ or pill milling or encapsulating operations. When encountering unknown powders, personnel should use, at the minimum, Personal PPE to include nitrile gloves, N-95 dust mask, eye protection, disposable paper suit, or paper coveralls, and shoe covers. Naloxone should also be readily available for administration.

To limit the potential for exposure, personnel should refrain from eating, drinking, or smoking while in the presence of any suspected fentanyl-related substance.

There are currently numerous fentanyl- related substances available on the illicit domestic market including, but not limited to, 4-fluoroisobutyryl fentanyl, furanyl- fentanyl, acryl-fentanyl, acetyl-fentanyl, carfentanil, and 3-methylfentanyl, as well as other synthetic opioids such as U-47700.