

Health Advisory

Fentanyl Overdose Events Associated with Smoking Crack Cocaine

June 26, 2018

Since June 16th, twenty suspected opioid overdose events associated with smoking crack cocaine have been reported to the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH). Among these 20 cases, there have been two deaths and several individuals with serious sequelae, such as anoxic brain injury. Most patients were African American and aged 40-50 years. Two-thirds were male. The clinical presentation of cases was typical of opioid overdose with pinpoint pupils, loss of consciousness, respiratory depression, and circulatory failure. Typical signs of crack intoxication were absent. Reports from first responders indicated that many patients required higher than usual doses of naloxone (6-8 mg) for overdose reversal.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Cluster of patients reporting crack cocaine use have been identified with fentanyl overdose in W. Philly
- Perform toxicology testing on overdose patients with inconsistent signs for the drug reported to have been used
- Report overdose events when drug contamination suspected

This cluster of unintentional drug-related overdoses is being recognized primarily in the Haverford North, Mantua, and Powelton Village neighborhoods of West Philadelphia, although there is potential for occurrence in other areas of the city too. Many of the cases reported that they thought they were using crack cocaine only, or they were found with crack-related paraphernalia on their person. Among the patients who had clinical toxicology performed, fentanyl was the sole drug detected.

Although clusters of overdose events caused by fentanyl-contaminated crack cocaine have been reported elsewhere, this is the first such event in Philadelphia. Providers should be alert to the potential for opioid overdose even if the drug consumed is reported to be a non-opioid. Perform clinical toxicology testing to detect fentanyl when drug contamination is suspected. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is working to warn the public about suspected contamination of crack cocaine, especially in West Philadelphia, and to distribute naloxone and educational materials to populations at highest risk.

Unintentional drug overdose is not reportable by name in Philadelphia. However, receiving de-identified or aggregated information on patients with suspected fentanyl overdose following use of non-opioid drugs is important. Please report such events to the Philadelphia Department of Public Health at 215-685-5200.

Patient Resources

- **Naloxone**
 - Learn how to get and use naloxone – www.phillynaloxone.com
- **Treatment**
 - Behavioral Health Services Initiative (uninsured): 1-215-546-1200
 - Community Behavioral Health (Medicaid): 1-888-545-2600
 - <http://dbhids.org/addiction-services/>