



NEWS RELEASE

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Poison Centers Provide Emergency Information and Treatment Advice During Recent Heroin Overdose Outbreak

ALEXANDRIA, VA – After a series of heroin overdose outbreaks swept through Cincinnati last week, health officials have confirmed approximately 174 overdoses, and at least three deaths. During the same time period, additional heroin overdoses and deaths were also reported in Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia, and New Jersey.

“These overdoses are extremely worrisome,” said Shan Yin, MD, MPH and Medical Director of the Cincinnati Drug and Poison Information Center. “In many cases, they have not responded to the usual dose of the standard antidote (naloxone) for heroin overdoses. Health care professionals and the public should be aware that much higher doses of naloxone may be necessary.”

While law enforcement officials are still investigating the source or sources of the outbreak, the culprit is believed to be a highly toxic mixture of heroin and carfentanil, a tranquilizer used on large animals, such as elephants. Carfentanil is one of the strongest opioids used commercially to sedate large animals, around ten thousand times stronger than morphine and one hundred times more potent than fentanyl.

For months, authorities have expressed concern about the spread of this deadly combination, which produces stronger, longer-lasting, and more addictive effects. In its liquid form, carfentanil is odorless and colorless, making it invisible to the recreational drug user. It’s highly unlikely that a user knows how much of the drug they are taking or that they are even taking it. Similar to fentanyl, carfentanil is not only dangerous to the user but also anyone who comes into contact with it, as it can be inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

“As this dangerous epidemic continues to spread across the country, it is vital that anyone who has potentially used this drug mixture or come into contact with it call their local poison center at 1 (800) 222-1222 immediately,” said Stephen T. Kaminski, JD, AAPCC CEO and Executive Director. “With all of the unknowns surrounding this mixture, seeking the medical expertise and treatment advice of a poison center toxicology specialists could potentially be lifesaving.”

Poison centers are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year-round, for questions or emergencies regarding poisons. All poison centers can be reached by calling the same telephone number, 1-800-222-1222. Poison centers are staffed by toxicology specialists, including nurses, pharmacists, physicians and poison information providers.

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For more information on the dangerous health effects of prescription opioids, visit our *Opioid (Narcotic) Pain Medications* alerts page, <http://www.aapcc.org/alerts/opioids/>.

For more information, the media may contact Angela Gonzales, AAPCC Associate Manager, Communications and Outreach, at 703-894-1865 or gonzales@aapcc.org.

*AAPCC supports the nation's 55 poison center members in their efforts to treat and prevent drug, consumer product, animal, environmental and food poisoning. Members staff the Poison Help hotline at 1-800-222-1222 that provides free, confidential, expert medical advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year from toxicology specialists, including nurses, pharmacists, physicians and poison information providers. In addition, AAPCC maintains the only poison information and surveillance database in the United States, providing real-time monitoring of unusual poisoning patterns, chemical exposures and other emerging public health hazards. AAPCC partners with federal agencies such as HRSA, CDC, FDA and EPA, as well as private industry. **Be prepared for a poisoning emergency and program the Poison Help phone number into your mobile telephone today – 1 (800) 222-1222.***

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