

Advisory : Bootleg Fentanyl in Ontario's Illicit Drug Supply

For Release August 29, 2016

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

Bootleg fentanyl have 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 is 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.

In Ontario, bootleg fentanyl have 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.

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 6,000 people have died of an opioid-related overdose since 2000. 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. We encourage the Province of Ontario to expedite previous requests to establish dedicated leadership to urgently collaborate with all stakeholders in emergency preparedness planning, and the coordination of interventions that will save lives, reduce injury and improve safety for all Ontarians.

For more information contact:

1. Michael Parkinson, Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council: 519-504-8758
2. Joe Couto, The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police: 416-919-9798

About the organizations supporting this Advisory

The Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC)

The WRCPC has worked collaboratively to prevent crime, fear of crime and victimization since 1994. A national model for crime prevention through social development, the WRCPC has been involved with [drug-related issues](#) locally and beyond. Our research identified bootleg fentanyl as an issue in 2008 and in 2013, the WRCPC and Peterborough Police Service issued [a province-wide advisory](#) after bootleg fentanyl was detected in several communities.

www.overdoseprevention.ca www.preventingcrime.ca

The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP)

The OACP is the voice of Ontario's police leaders. The OACP's 1,200 members serve in senior leadership positions with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police, First Nations and Municipal Police Services in the Province of Ontario.

<http://www.oacp.on.ca/> www.facethefentanyl.ca

Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario (MDSCNO)

Ontario is unique for the presence of more than 20 community-based drug strategies serving more than 8 million people across the province. Using a collaborative, integrated approach to issues of problematic substance use, drug strategies focus on evidence-based initiatives in prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement-justice. In June 2015, the MDSCNO released [Prescription For Life](#), a widely supported series of urgent recommendations for governments and other stakeholders to reduce opioid-related deaths.

www.drugstrategy.ca

Ontario Overdose Prevention and Naloxone Access Working Group (OOPNA)

OOPNA draws its membership from policy, health system planning and performance, public health, clinical medicine, harm reduction and other relevant stakeholder groups to review and advance evidence-based initiatives in opioid overdose prevention and intervention. Echoing other urgent calls for leadership, collaboration and coordination in Ontario, OOPNA has made requests to the provincial government in [2015](#) and with 233 other signatories, in [April 2016](#).

Tips for Media

Use 'person-first' language. Describing people using substances as 'addicts' or 'abusers' is popular but not accurate and exacerbates the stigmatization of those using or affected by substance use.

People using substances occasionally and daily are at risk of an opioid overdose. Many people will be unaware their drugs have been contaminated by bootleg fentanyl.

An opioid overdose victim cannot save themselves. In any opioid overdose, seconds matter.

Onset of a fentanyl overdose is often rapid when compared to other opioids.

Morphine (not heroin) is the reference standard when describing the toxicity of opioids. There are many fentanyls of varying toxicity compared to morphine (e.g. carfentanil is 10,000x more toxic).

The emergence of bootleg fentanyls and other novel substances are a significant threat to health and safety on top of Ontario's existing opioid crisis.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control has issued a [Health Alert](#) and called for 'urgent, collaborative action'. Many organizations and individuals have [requested](#) a stronger, collaborative role from the Province.

Tips for Service Providers and People Who Use Drugs**

Bootleg fentanyls 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.

If you 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