



DATE:	6/6/2017
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Karen M. Murphy, PhD, RN, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Carfentanil-Related Overdoses
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	Statewide
STREET ADDRESS:	Statewide
COUNTY:	Statewide
MUNICIPALITY:	Statewide
ZIP CODE:	Statewide

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” that provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING, AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL.

EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE.

FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE.

LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP.

Through its partners, the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) has been made aware of carfentanil-related overdoses in several areas of Pennsylvania. Some of these areas have seen significant numbers of these overdoses, some of which were fatal. Carfentanil is a synthetic opioid, federally categorized Schedule II controlled substance, with a clinical potency 10,000 times that of morphine and 100 times that of fentanyl.

First responders should use caution and utilize appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when handling carfentanil due to the drug’s ability to be absorbed through the skin. As a result, carfentanil could pose a grave danger to law enforcement and other first responders encountering the drug in an emergency medical situation.

Signs and symptoms of exposure to carfentanil are consistent with opioid toxicity and include:

- pinpoint pupils;
- respiratory depression (shallow or absent breathing);
- depressed mental status (dizziness, lethargy, sedation or loss of consciousness);
- gastrointestinal irritation (nausea, vomiting); and
- cardiovascular failure (weak or absent pulses and cold, clammy skin).

Ultimately, due to the hypoxia that can develop as a result of severe respiratory depression, onset of complete cardiac arrest and death may occur quickly.

Treatment options should mirror those utilized in other opioid overdose situations, focusing especially on aggressive airway management and mechanical ventilation. Due to the potency of carfentanil, more than one dose of naloxone (Narcan) may be required to reverse these overdoses.

Additional information will be shared as the situation continues to develop.

Any questions or concerns regarding these recommendations should be directed to the PADOH (1-877-PA-HEALTH) or your local health department.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.

This information is current as of June 6, 2017, but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.
