



Deaths Related to Fentanyl-Laced Heroin and Other Illicit Drugs

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Background

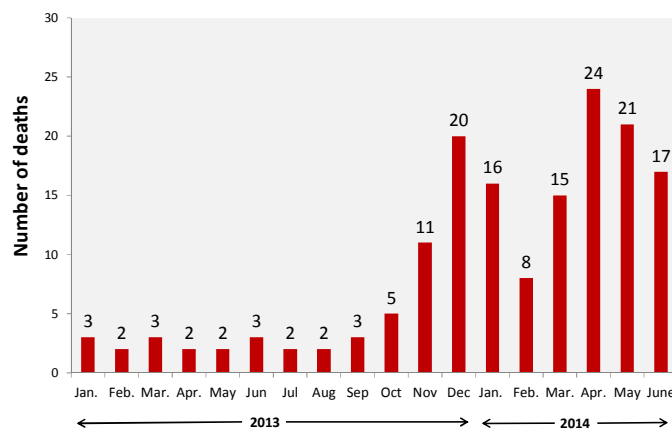
Fentanyl is a narcotic pain reliever used to manage moderate to severe chronic pain. Pharmaceutical fentanyl is known by a number of brand names, including Duragesic, Actiq and Sublimaze and is typically administered through a transdermal patch, or in injection or lozenge form. Both pharmaceutical fentanyl, and an illicit version of the drug that is produced in clandestine laboratories, are used recreationally.

Current Update

Beginning in late 2013, there were sudden and large increases in the number of deaths involving fentanyl in a number of states throughout the country, including Maryland. East Coast States in particular have seen a rise in the number of fentanyl-related deaths since late 2013. The majority of these deaths were not the result of overdoses of pharmaceutical fentanyl, but instead involved an illicit, powdered form of fentanyl that was mixed with, or substituted for, heroin or other illicit substances. Fentanyl is many times more potent than heroin, and greatly increases the risk of an overdose death.

A total of 137 fentanyl-related deaths have occurred in Maryland since October 2013, when the number of deaths began to increase. This is an average of 15

Number of Fentanyl-Related Intoxication Deaths Occurring in Maryland by Month, January 2013 - June 2014.*



*Includes cases finalized by the Office of the Medical Examiner through 6/30/14.

deaths per month, compared with an average of two deaths per month in Maryland during the years 2007-2012.

A total of 115 of the 137 deaths occurring in Maryland since October 2013 occurred following the use of fentanyl in combination with other substances, mainly heroin (63.5%, n=87). Fentanyl-related deaths also frequently involved the concurrent use of prescription opioids, alcohol, and/or cocaine.

Reducing Fentanyl-Related Overdoses

There are three major efforts to reduce fentanyl-related overdoses throughout the State.

- ⇒ **Sharing Data with Law Enforcement.** The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has established timely data sharing with federal, State and local law enforcement task forces to assist investigations into the distribution of illicit fentanyl.
- ⇒ **Expanding Access to Naloxone.** Information on the heightened risk of overdose from fentanyl has been included in the mandatory training curriculum for certification under the Overdose Response Program. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has implemented the Overdose Response Program to train and certify individuals to carry and administer Naloxone, a life-saving medication that can safely and effectively reverse overdoses related to heroin and pharmaceutical opioids. In addition, as of July 1, 2014, all advanced life support providers in Maryland will have received training to administer intranasal Naloxone. Finally, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention are collaborating to train and equip law enforcement officers across the State with Naloxone.
- ⇒ **Launching Public Awareness Campaign.** On June 27, 2014, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene began an aggressive public awareness campaign encouraging Maryland residents to "TAKE ACT!ON" and "Be A Hero" in the fight against opioid overdoses. As part of this effort, the Department will be delivering posters, pamphlets, and emergency cards to each local health department for distribution throughout their jurisdiction. Campaign materials will also be shared with first responders, local jails, detention centers, hospital emergency rooms, grocery stores, and other locations throughout Maryland.