



Boston Public Health Commission

Health Advisory

HEROIN CONTAMINATED WITH FENTANYL

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC), in conjunction with the Boston Police Department, has received evidence that a recent non-fatal overdose in the city was due to heroin contaminated with fentanyl. As you know, fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that can cause severe injury and even death when used in combination with heroin. Earlier this year SAMHSA reported 17 deaths linked to the possible use of fentanyl-contaminated heroin in the Pittsburgh metro area, and 22 deaths were reported in Rhode Island in January. While the recent incident in Boston accounted for one non-fatal incident, it is crucial that our partners in the treatment community remain vigilant, as the northeast region of the US has seen several fatalities linked to fentanyl in recent months.

The abuse of illicit and prescription drugs continues to be a major issue in Boston, with high levels of abuse and deaths associated with opioids. Between 2010 and 2012, unintentional drug overdoses increased by 39% in the city of Boston. Heroin and prescription drug overdoses are on the rise among White, Black, and Latino residents. There was a 76% increase in the rate of heroin overdoses between 2010 and 2012, higher than the rate of increase for other substances. As of April 22, Boston EMS had administered Narcan 158 times since the beginning of the year compared to 131 times for the same period in 2013.

BPHC encourages emergency departments and emergency response services, health care providers, substance abuse treatment providers, public safety first responders, and the general public to **exercise increased vigilance in promptly identifying suspected overdose patients** and taking appropriate action. Signs and symptoms of a fentanyl overdose are consistent with other opioid overdoses and include: unconsciousness or unresponsiveness; respiratory depression or arrest; cyanosis; vomiting; and pinpoint pupils.

The Good Samaritan Law provides protection to people who call 911 to report drug overdoses. This law is intended to encourage people to report drug overdoses as soon as possible, even if drugs are present at the scene.

The BPHC's Overdose Prevention and Narcan distribution program trains opioid users and their families, providers and first responders on how to prevent, recognize, and intervene during an opioid overdose using nasal Narcan. Providers and residents interested in overdose prevention training can contact the BPHC Overdose Prevention Program at 617-534-3968.