

ACETYL-FENTANYL CLINICAL ALERT

Information for Emergency Departments, Ambulance Service, Intensive Care Units, Clinical Toxicology Units, Mental Health Services and Drug and Alcohol Services

- 1. NSW Health recommends a high index of suspicion for acetyl-fentanyl and fentanyl in suspected opioid overdose, particularly in people who report using illicit stimulants such as cocaine or methamphetamine but who present clinically with an opioid overdose.**
- 2. There have been multiple confirmed clinical cases of acetyl-fentanyl and fentanyl overdose in Sydney. These substances may be being sold as cocaine or methamphetamine. Continue to monitor suspected opioid overdoses and use titrated doses of naloxone as needed as acetyl-fentanyl and fentanyl last longer than heroin.**
- 3. Notify the NSW Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) of any case of reported stimulant use that has symptoms and signs of an opioid overdose, eg respiratory depression and/or reduced level of consciousness that responds to naloxone.**

Background

Acetyl-fentanyl and fentanyl are opioids that are both known to cause serious harm and death. There is evidence that these drugs are currently circulating in the Sydney region and may be being sold as cocaine or methamphetamine. Therefore groups of people who regularly do not use opioids ('opioid naïve') may unintentionally be exposed and are at an elevated risk of overdose. People who regularly use opioids are still at a high risk due to the high potency of fentanyl and acetyl-fentanyl. Acetyl-fentanyl is highly potent, though less so than fentanyl.

Case management

- Airway management, oxygenation, and ventilation support take precedence over naloxone, where appropriate.
- Cases may require titrated doses of naloxone with a higher total dose. Balance this against the risk of precipitated withdrawal in an opioid dependent person.
- Duration of effects from acetyl-fentanyl and fentanyl are longer than for heroin. Cases may require repeated doses of naloxone or a continuous infusion. Contact the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) or local toxicology service for advice, or notify prior to discharge.

Notification

Notify the NSW Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) for all suspected opioid overdoses where the patient reported taking a stimulant. Please ensure that urine and blood samples are collected and retained. The Poisons Information Centre will pass on the notification to the NSW Ministry of Health.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kerry Chant PSM
Chief Health Officer and Deputy Secretary, Population and Public Health
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