



News for Immediate Release

June 27, 2013

Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Warns about Acetyl Fentanyl Drug Caused at Least 50 Fatalities This Year in Pennsylvania

Harrisburg – The Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs issued a warning today about fentanyl and its derivative, acetyl fentanyl, a deadly drug that resembles heroin, but is much more potent and has caused 50 deaths in Pennsylvania this year.

After recently confirming five overdoses, including one fatality, from the drug in Lebanon County, the department last week called upon coroners and medical examiners across Pennsylvania to screen for the drug on all apparent heroin and other opioid deaths, in order to accurately track the extent of the problem.

As a result, the department determined that recreational use of both versions of the drug has resulted in at least 50 confirmed fatalities and five non-fatal overdoses statewide this year.

Overdoses have been confirmed in Allegheny, Beaver, Berks, Blair, Bradford, Bucks, Butler, Cambria, Delaware, Erie, Lebanon, Lehigh, Philadelphia, Washington and Westmoreland counties. The department is also awaiting toxicology reports from several other counties.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported in a health alert that the drug has also caused 14 deaths in Rhode Island since early March. The department has been in communication with CDC, seeking technical assistance to address the issue in Pennsylvania.

Fentanyl is a prescription narcotic used to relieve severe or chronic pain, commonly used for cancer patients or as a last-resort pain medication. It's available as a skin patch, lozenge, pill, shot, a film that dissolves in the mouth, or intravenously.

As a recreational drug, acetyl fentanyl can often resemble heroin, as it has the same consistency, color and packaging. If a heroin user unknowingly mistakes fentanyl for heroin and takes too much of the drug, the user is at high risk of a fatal overdose. During the last major fentanyl overdose outbreak in 2006, there were 269 deaths in Philadelphia alone.

"This is an especially important time for those addicted to heroin to seek treatment," Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Secretary Gary Tennis

urged. "Treatment works; these individuals, rather than risk death day after day, can attain recovery and go on to live rich and rewarding lives."

To view the CDC Health Alert, visit: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/HAN/han00350.asp>.

For further information about the drug, visit: <http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/fentanyl>.

To seek treatment for drug or alcohol addiction, visit www.ddap.pa.gov.

Media contact: Christine Cronkright, Governor's Press Office, 717-783-1116

###