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## HEALTH ADVISORY

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### Opium Overdoses in San Francisco Due to Fentanyl-Containing “Crack” Cocaine

On April 23-24, three adults from one housing location presented to an SF hospital with symptoms of opioid overdose after smoking what they thought was “crack” cocaine. A fourth adult from that location was found deceased on April 25. Fentanyl was detected in the decedent’s blood as well as in a drug specimen found in the decedent’s possession.

Fentanyl is an extremely potent, short-acting opioid that is particularly dangerous when used illicitly, as it is medically dosed in tiny (microgram) quantities. Users with little or no opioid tolerance are at high risk of fentanyl overdose. Fentanyl can be challenging to reverse with naloxone, often requiring extra doses. Street drugs may be laced with fentanyl, or can consist entirely of fentanyl while being sold as another drug.

Persons who may be exposed to opioids should be encouraged to have access to naloxone. Naloxone is a short-acting opioid antagonist that is sprayed intranasally or injected to reverse an overdose. Per California law (AB635 and AB1535) naloxone is not a controlled substance, can be prescribed by any licensed healthcare provider, and can be administered by witnesses as a first aid measure. It is covered by Medi-Cal, Healthy SF, and most health plans and can also be furnished by pharmacists registered to do so without a prescription. It is also available at no cost from the DOPE Project, targeting drug users and their friends and family via syringe access sites.

#### **ACTIONS REQUESTED OF SF CLINICIANS:**

- 1. Counsel patients to avoid purchasing drugs on the street.**
- 2. Consider testing for fentanyl** in patients presenting with symptoms of opioid overdose, particularly if they did not intend to take an opioid. Note: request fentanyl specifically as it is not detected with routine toxicology testing.
- 3. Ensure that patients who use street drugs (any drugs, not just opioids) have naloxone.** Direct patients to the DOPE Project or prescribe naloxone directly. The CBHS pharmacy (1380 Howard St, Tel. 415-255-3659; 9:00a-4:30p M-F) is also a walk-in source of naloxone without a prescription.
- 4. Refer patients who need addiction treatment.** See below for treatment referrals.
- 5. Treat synthetic opioids such as fentanyl or carfentanil as hazardous materials.** Handling should be only by trained professionals with appropriate personal protective equipment due to extremely high toxicity. See: <https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2016/hq092216.shtml>

#### **Resources:**

- CA Poison Control (800-222-1222) will answer public and provider questions regarding overdoses or symptoms
- Treatment Referrals:
  - SFDPH triage center – Treatment Access Program (TAP) @ 1380 Howard St, 8am-4:30pm weekdays; also 24/7 Access Helpline (415-255-3737 or 888-246-3333; TDD 888-484-7200)
  - BAART Turk Street and Market Street Clinics; Tel 415-928-7800; ask for intake counselor
  - Buprenorphine Treatment Physician Locator: <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/physician-program-data/treatment-physician-locator>
- Naloxone from DOPE Project: Contact Eliza Wheeler at [wheeler@harmreduction.org](mailto:wheeler@harmreduction.org) or Tel 510-285-2871
- Naloxone prescribing information: go to <http://www.sfhealthnetwork.org/employee-physicians/pain-management-resources/> and scroll down to Naloxone Prescribing, Education, and Awareness.