

THE DANGERS OF FENTANYL AND CARFENTANYL

Huntington has been on the front lines in the battle against drug abuse in West Virginia for years, but even officials there were shocked by Monday's developments. Emergency responders answered 26 drug overdose calls between 3:30 p.m. and 9 p.m. At one point every available ambulance in the county had been dispatched to treat drug overdoses. Huntington officials believe fentanyl was a likely contributor to so many overdose cases Monday.

The drug abuse problem has been evolving here and throughout Appalachia. The flood of powerful prescription pain medications, including Oxycontin, ramped up addiction. Addicts switched to heroin after law enforcement and the medical community clamped down on prescription opioids.

But now heroin is being replaced by, or in some cases mixed with, fentanyl, a synthetic pain killer 50 times more powerful than heroin and 100 times more powerful than morphine. It acts so fast that users often don't have time to remove the needle from their arm before they slip into unconsciousness.

As OxyContin overdose deaths have declined in many areas, fentanyl-related deaths have increased. The Charleston Gazette-Mail reported earlier this year that deaths in the state linked to fentanyl rose from 55 in 2014 to 154 last year. Milwaukee, Wisconsin recorded 20 overdose deaths from fentanyl during a recent two-week period.

As if the problem couldn't get any worse, an even stronger version of the drug is becoming available on the street—carfentanyl. The Washington Post called carfentanyl "the most potent commercial opioid in the world—10,000 times stronger than morphine." It's so strong it's used as a tranquilizer for elephants.

Coincidentally, Republican Gubernatorial candidate Bill Cole announced just yesterday his plan for combating the drug epidemic. If elected he will call a special session of the Legislature devoted to dealing with the problem.

His proposals include harsher penalties for drug kingpins, but more sentencing alternatives for low-level drug offenders who "demonstrate the potential to get clean, get a job, and return as a productive member of society."

The state's struggling economy is the top issue in this gubernatorial campaign, and substance abuse is intertwined with it. Monday's stunning string of overdose calls is a stark example of just how much work lies ahead to solve the drug problem.

"Drug overdose scare highlights drug problem in WV" MetroNews, 17 Aug. 2016, "<http://wvmetronews.com/2016/08/17/drug-overdose-scare-highlights-drug-problem-in-wv/>."

Side Effects Include

- Nausea and vomiting
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Lethargy, tiredness, weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of hands, feet, ankles
- Headaches
- Addiction and risk of overdose



For more information and a tailored drug testing quote for your business, contact Safety First at 800-245-1150.