

Hot Tips: Public Health Advisory

#128 Date: 5/31/2022

Please copy and distribute to ALL physicians at your location.

Potential Drug Overdose Alert

Key Messages

- Three cases of accidental drug overdoses among adolescents in Los Angeles County were identified over the past several days that resulted in unexpected cardiac and neurologic toxicities. All cases involved the presumed use of ecstasy that was contaminated with fentanyl and other yet-to-be-identified psychoactive substance(s). All three cases were responsive to naloxone.
- The likelihood that contaminated ecstasy and other pills are available in the community is very high, as is the risk of overdose when exposed to these substances.
- Emergency clinicians should evaluate their patients with suspected drug-induced altered mental status for cardiac and neurological toxicity.
- Widespread access to harm reduction interventions such as naloxone (an opioid overdose reversal medication, commonly known as the brand name Narcan) and drug checking with fentanyl test strips, which can test a drug supply for fentanyl and other common contaminants, is essential to prevent accidental overdoses and death in adolescents.

Situation

On 25 May 2022, three female adolescents were found down in a Los Angeles County residence. They required emergency medical intervention including intranasal naloxone and intubation. The adolescents had purchased blue circular tablets that were reportedly ecstasy from an online dealer, who they reported arrived with a large bag of these pills, raising significant concern for the possibility of ongoing overdoses in Los Angeles County. The adolescents crushed and snorted the tablets and subsequently lost consciousness. Clinically, they were found to have significant cardiac and neurologic toxicity from the substances: there were elevated troponins with shortened ejection fractions with echocardiograms but no EKG evidence of a heart attack, and watershed infarcts in the basal ganglia on MRI with persistent rigidity and posturing on clinical examination. This incident highlights the growing national and local trend of illicit drugs and counterfeit pills being contaminated with illegally manufactured fentanyl and other stimulant contaminants with toxicity impacting multiple organ systems, including the heart and brain, that can lead to life threatening complications.

As it is possible that some of this drug will make its way into Ventura County, it behooves physicians and first responders to be aware this issue.

For further information, including actions requested of providers and additional resources, please refer to this May 27th Health Alert under the 2022 HAN Communications section on the [LACDPH – Los Angeles Health Alert Network page](#), or the alert can be viewed directly [here](#).

This bulletin is intended to improve the public health in our county by keeping physicians and nurses informed of noteworthy diagnoses, disease trends, and other events of medical interest. Another goal of a public health department is to educate. We hope that you will use this information to increase your awareness. Please allow us to continue in our role of speaking to the press so that we may maximize the educational message to the benefit of all citizens of Ventura County.