



Health Advisory

RECENT INCREASE IN SUSPECTED OVERDOSE DEATHS

October 11, 2016

Boston public safety and public health officials are joining recovery service providers in urging the public to **exercise increased vigilance in promptly identifying suspected overdose patients** and taking appropriate action, after Boston Police Department (BPD) recorded 16 suspected overdose deaths last month.

Signs and symptoms of fentanyl overdose are consistent with narcotic overdose and include: unconsciousness, unresponsiveness, choking or gurgling sounds, bluish or ashen skin tone, and vomiting. If you see someone you suspect to be having an overdose, call 911.

The Good Samaritan Law provides protection to people who call 911 to report drug overdoses. This law is intended to encourage people to report drug overdoses as soon as possible, even if drugs are present at the scene.

In addition to an increase in fatal overdoses, Boston is seeing a rise in the number of narcotic-related emergency medical incidents and the use of Narcan. Since the start of the calendar year, Boston EMS has responded to 2,370 incidents identified as suspected to be related to narcotic, an increase of nearly 14 percent when compared with the same time period in 2015. Of those incidents, 1,245 required administration of Narcan, a 35 percent increase compared to the same time last year.

Nationally, public health and public safety officials are seeing an increased use in synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, which can be more potent and dangerous. In June, the Boston Regional Intelligence Center issued an [awareness bulletin](#) detailing the risk associated with fentanyl, a potent, synthetic opioid pain medication with a rapid onset that is suspected to have been sold in Boston.

Fentanyl can result in quick and simultaneous overdoses in group settings. Active users are encouraged to make a safety plan, carry Narcan, and avoid using drugs alone. The majority of suspected deaths in September occurred behind closed doors, in homes or in secluded areas.

BPHC's Overdose Education and Narcan Distribution program trains opioid users, families, and providers on how to prevent, recognize, and intervene during an opioid overdose using nasal Narcan. Providers and residents interested in overdose prevention training can contact the BPHC Overdose Prevention Program at 617-534-5072 or visit www.bphc.org/narcan.

For information about recovery support services, residents are encouraged to call the Mayor's **311 hotline for recovery services**, the City of Boston's confidential 24/7 referral center for addiction treatment and recovery service information.