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HEALTH ADVISORY

APRIL 11, 2016

FENTANYL OVERDOSES FROM COUNTERFEIT NORCO®

To: Healthcare Providers, Ambulance Providers, Coroner's Office

From: Karen Relucio, MD, Public Health Officer

SUMMARY:

This advisory provides information about recent drug overdose activity in Sacramento County, treatment options, reporting procedures, and additional resources for Napa County clinicians, emergency responders and community-based providers. Napa County Public Health is closely monitoring the local situation.

CURRENT SITUATION

Sacramento County health officials are responding to an ongoing health emergency during which there have been at least 48 drug overdose cases presenting to local hospitals and at least ten deaths over a ten-day period. It is believed that these overdoses and deaths are the result of consumption of illicitly obtained "pills" that the purchasers believed to be the opioid drug Norco.® The pills are believed to have actually contained Fentanyl, instead of the active ingredients of Norco (acetaminophen and hydrocodone). Fentanyl is a synthetic opiate analgesic that is approximately 80 to 100 times more potent than morphine and roughly 40 to 50 times more potent than pharmaceutical grade (100% pure) heroin.

Actions Requested of Healthcare Professionals:

1. **Exercise increased vigilance** in promptly identifying suspected overdose patients and taking appropriate action. Signs and symptoms of opioid overdose include central nervous system depression (i.e., coma, lethargy, or stupor); constipation, nausea, and vomiting; flushing and pruritus; hypotension; miosis (pinpoint pupils); pulmonary edema; respiratory depression; and seizures.
2. **Report** suspected and confirmed cases of opioid overdoses to Napa County Public Health by faxing a Confidential Morbidity Report to Public Health at **(707) 299-4479** or by phone at **(707) 253-4231**.
3. **Order toxicology screening** specific for fentanyl in cases of severe overdoses.
4. **Prescribe and/or recommend intranasal or intramuscular Naloxone** to patients, family members or other caregivers at risk for opioid overdose. Be aware that it may take repeated doses of Naloxone over several hours to adequately treat fentanyl overdose, likely due to fentanyl's long half-life
5. **Warn** clients and patients with a history of substance abuse against taking prescription-like pills that are not prescribed by a health care provider and dispensed by a pharmacy. Counterfeit Norco pills containing fentanyl are very difficult to distinguish from actual Norco pills.

References:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [Health Advisory](#)
- California Department of Public Health: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Pages/NR16-020.aspx>