



# THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Michael R. Bloomberg  
Mayor

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner

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## 2006 NYC DOHMH Health Alert # 24: Fentanyl-related overdose deaths in New York City

- 4 New York City residents have died from fentanyl-related overdose since May 2006.
- These cases appear to be accidental overdoses in which fentanyl was mixed with an opioid such as heroin or methadone, or with other drugs or medications.
- All 4 deaths were among men in their late thirties or mid-forties.
- Symptoms of fentanyl-related overdose include marked central nervous system depression – lethargy, respiratory depression, and miosis, **particularly with a negative toxicology screen for opioids.**
- Persons with suspected fentanyl-related overdose should be treated with naloxone. They may require larger than usual doses (2-10 mg) due to the high potency of fentanyl (50-80 times that of morphine).
- All cases of suspected or confirmed overdose must be reported to DOHMH (see contact information below).

*Please share with your colleagues in emergency medicine, internal medicine, family practice, psychiatry, and substance abuse treatment teams.*

August 4, 2006

Dear Colleagues,

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene issued Health Alert #17 on June 23, 2006 describing an outbreak of overdoses and deaths involving fentanyl combined with heroin, cocaine and other drugs. There are now reports of 4 fentanyl-related deaths in NYC. These cases appear to be accidental overdoses in which fentanyl is mixed with an opioid such as heroin or methadone, or with other drugs or medications.

Symptoms of overdose are characteristic of central nervous system depression: lethargy, respiratory depression, and miosis. Fentanyl is not detected by standard urine toxicology screening; therefore, its presence should not be excluded based on negative results. ***In fact, a***

*characteristic response to naloxone with a negative toxicology screen is highly suggestive of fentanyl overdose.*

Fentanyl is an opioid analgesic whose effects are essentially indistinguishable from those of heroin except that it has a shorter duration of action. Fentanyl is significantly more potent than heroin and 50-80 times more potent than morphine. Treatment is similar to that for other opioid overdose, but much larger doses of naloxone (2-10mg) may be required.

Providers should be aware that naloxone is available to opiate users at certain syringe exchange programs; for further information please contact the Harm Reduction Coalition at 212-213-6376.

For more information or consultation on a specific case call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 or 212-764-7667 (POISONS).

To report a suspect or confirmed case of poisoning by drugs or other toxic agents (required within 24 hours under Health Code Section 11.03(a)), call the Poison Control Center immediately at 1-800-222-1222 or 212-764-7667 (POISONS).

As always, the NYC DOHMH greatly appreciates its partnership with the medical community in New York City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lloyd Sederer".

**Lloyd Sederer, MD**  
**Executive Deputy Commissioner**  
**Division of Mental Hygiene**