



## CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

*Promoting Recovery, Resilience & Self Determination*

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Division of Social Services

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Dear Colleague,

Since mid-April through July of this year, Philadelphia communities have seen more than seventy deaths as a result of a lethal combination of street drugs. The underlying cause of these deaths appears to be the addition of fentanyl, a powerful narcotic analgesic, to heroin/morphine, cocaine being sold on the street.

Fentanyl, prescribed most often by physicians to treat patients with severe or chronic pain, is fifty to one hundred times more powerful than morphine. The fentanyl that has been related to the recent clusters of drug-related deaths in Philadelphia, as well as Chicago, St. Louis, and, Detroit, is manufactured illicitly. When used illegally, particularly in combination with a drug such as heroin or cocaine, or when used in excessive amounts, fentanyl can result in irregular heartbeat, the inability to breathe, and death.

In some cases, heroin or cocaine users are aware they are purchasing this dangerous combination of drugs; in other cases, the buyer is not aware that he or she is purchasing this potentially lethal drug combination. This recent series of deaths should motivate our heightened vigilance in our communities for possible circulation of this potent drug mixture and help educate individuals with whom we come in contact.

As professionals involved in substance abuse treatment and prevention, you have many tools at your disposal in your communities to help prevent overdoses and deaths, and to help identify and rapidly treat overdoses. We have attached a fact sheet provided by the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment that can be reproduced and distributed. We hope you will work with your local health authorities to bring this critical information to first responders, emergency room personnel, street substance abuse workers, drug treatment facilities, local health care providers, the recovery community, and the public at large. At the very least, please get the word out to your own networks of patients and colleagues about this dangerous drug combination and how to treat its effects.

The Department of Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation Services, in conjunction with the Department of Public Health, can provide additional information to you on this emerging area of substance abuse concern. Please contact Sam Cutler at 215-685-5414 or [sam.cutler@phila.gov](mailto:sam.cutler@phila.gov). Let us know what you are doing in your community. Together, we can reduce the danger associated with this new, often lethal, street drug cocktail.

Sincerely,

Arthur C. Evans Jr., Ph.D.  
Director, DBH/MRS

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Director Addiction Services Division of DBH/MRS

Cc: Carmen Paris, Philadelphia Health Commissioner  
Lloyd Ayers, Philadelphia Fire Commissioner

Enclosure: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, June, 2006