

CARFENTANIL SAFETY ALERT

Information for emergency departments, intensive care units,
clinical toxicology units, drug and alcohol services and NSW Ambulance



Health

1. NSW Health recommends a high index of suspicion for fentanyl or fentanyl analogues in all suspected overdoses involving opioids or unknown substances.
2. There has been a recent case of carfentanil detection in NSW. Carfentanil is a fentanyl analogue that is 100 times stronger than fentanyl. Small exposures can produce rapid and extreme opiate effects requiring repeated naloxone doses.
3. Contact the NSW Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) immediately for all suspected or confirmed carfentanil overdoses.

Background

Carfentanil is a potent fentanyl analogue that can cause rapid and extreme opiate effects to those exposed, including bystanders and health care workers. Exposure routes can include: topical, inhalation, ingestion, and needle-stick. Substances can be in liquid or powder form.

More than one drug class may be present simultaneously.

Case management

- Airway access, oxygenation, and ventilation support take precedence over naloxone, where appropriate.
- Cases may require escalating doses of naloxone (0.5 – 2mg), 60 seconds apart, up to 10mg in total. Balance this against the risk of precipitated withdrawal in an opioid dependent person.
- In cases of suspected opiate overdose, only handle substances that may be transported with the patient with full personal protective equipment including gowns, gloves, eyewear and mask. To assist with substance identification, paramedics have been asked to transport any substance to hospital with the patient where it is considered safe to do so. If a substance is transported with the patient, it should be sealed and secured in the department medication cupboard.

Notification

Please notify the NSW Poisons Information Centre on **13 11 26** of all suspected or confirmed carfentanil overdose cases, including overdoses requiring an increased initial dose (>0.8mg required to achieve a response) or repeated doses of naloxone. The Poisons Information Centre will pass on the notification to the NSW Ministry of Health.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kerry Chant PSM

Chief Health Officer and Deputy Secretary
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