

## **Bad street drugs kill 12 - Officials fear more will fall victim to painkiller, cocaine, heroin mix.**

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A deadly concoction of a painkiller mixed with cocaine or heroin has killed at least **12 drug** users in Detroit since Thursday and officials fear more people could die this weekend, health officials said on Friday.

Eight deaths were reported Friday and four the day before from the lethal mixture of the illegal **drugs** combined with the prescription painkiller Fentanyl.

"We deal with about three (overdose deaths) a day so this is a dramatic increase," said Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano.

Officials believe **drug** dealers are setting up labs, making the Fentanyl and distributing the mix in Detroit, Ficano said.

The wave is similar to recent rashes of overdoses involving Fentanyl-laced mixes that have hospitalized hundreds in other cities and killed dozens. In Detroit and several Wayne County suburbs, Fentanyl has been linked to 106 deaths between September and March.

Authorities are trying to get the word out to **drug** users who they suspect are unaware the heroin they're buying is laced. They're alerting media and county-run substance abuse and mental health programs.

The recent victims were found on the **streets** or in **drug** houses throughout the city; none arrived at a hospital alive. Ficano said "a couple" of the victims were from Oakland County. The remaining dead were Detroiters. Ficano would not release their names.

Wayne County officials are investigating and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is sending officials on Monday to examine the bodies. A health alert has been sent to Detroit hospitals. Fentanyl, a synthetic form of morphine about 50 times more potent, acts on the central nervous system to relieve pain. The **drug** comes in injectable form or pain patches and it is typically used in hospitals to control severe pain. A handful of victims have been found wearing Fentanyl patches.

In Howell, Kenneth Roger Hopkins, 33, is being charged for allegedly giving his Fentanyl prescription medication to David Michael Maybee, 36, also of Howell, who was found dead Jan. 6 on the floor of Hopkins' home.

Hopkins is being charged under a new state law that holds responsible anyone who delivers a controlled substance to another that causes that person's death. Conviction carries a penalty of up to life in prison.

Fentanyl is costly and difficult to find, making it an unlikely **street drug** . But officials think **drug** pushers have found a way to manufacture it.

Cocaine-heroin mixtures, often called speedballs, have been on the **streets** for years, but adding Fentanyl is a new way to speed up the high.

"Another thing we're seeing unique to Detroit is we see Fentanyl combined with cocaine. It's always been heroin," said Wayne County's chief medical examiner Carl J. Schmidt.

Any of the three **drugs** taken in a large enough dosage can prove fatal, since each acts on the central nervous system. Injecting heroin lowers blood pressure and slows the heart rate and breathing. Adding Fentanyl can stop the heart within seconds. A person taking the mixture would quickly become sedated and unresponsive before their breathing stops.

The high number of deaths in a short time is an ominous sign that the **drug** is circulating on the **streets** , said Dr. Tammy Lundstrom, chief quality and safety officer at the Detroit Medical Center.

"We hope the word gets out so more deaths can be prevented," Lundstrom said. "Just because **12** people have died, that doesn't mean there aren't more people out there who've taken it."

Adding to the problem is that officials are unsure whether other substances are being added to the already dangerous mix.

"We're not sure what these **drugs** are being combined with and cut with in the first place," said Dr. Victor Abuel, staff physician at Detroit's St. John Hospital. "Unfortunately, the people coming in are going to the medical examiner."

Ficano said the **drug** has been moving into the Midwest from the East Coast.

"Law enforcement's concern is it's being distributed in the Metro area on the **street** and it's very potent," he said. He warned families of **drug** users to be on the lookout this weekend.

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