

Deadly mix entices drug users - Some addicts say publicity about overdoses from fentanyl-spiked heroin, coke only draws them more.

Detroit News, The (MI) - Tuesday, June 6, 2006

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It's sold on the street as "Suicide," and if the name doesn't signal the risk, fears that it may have caused as many as 58 overdose deaths in Wayne County since May 18 should.

But a rise in deaths linked to heroin spiked with the painkiller fentanyl hasn't deterred some hardcore addicts from seeking the **drug** with the **deadly** nickname. Desperate for a high that gets elusive with time, a dedicated batch of **users** is turning to the cocktail whose effects can last all day.

Addicts told The Detroit News they're trying Suicide because they think they can manage the **drug** and avoid overdoses that have killed more than 130 **users** in Wayne County since January 2005. The News verified the identities of **users** , but agreed not to publish their last names.

"This is the biggest advertisement ever for the dope man: A **drug** that gets you so (messed) up, you die," said Susan, a Bloomfield Hills woman who has used heroin on and off for 18 years but has been clean for a month.

That newfound high could soon end, however. Federal investigators announced Monday they may have found the source for the **drugs** last month during a raid that closed an underground lab in Mexico.

U.S. and Mexican authorities arrested five people for manufacturing a knockoff of the **drug** that's prescribed to cancer patients and described as 50 times stronger than morphine. Chemical tests will determine if the lab was the source of **drugs** sold as "Suicide" in Detroit and several Midwestern cities.

"There may be more than one source," said John Walters, director of the White House Office of National **Drug** Control Policy. "We think this is the principal source."

Authorities would not comment Monday on their evidence, however, and a **Drug** Enforcement Administration spokesman in Chicago, Chris Hoyt, said agents "are not ready to say the lab discovered in Mexico is directly related to what's happening here."

"The raid in Mexico is good news, but it does nothing for the lethal **drug** supply on our streets right now," said Robert Ficano, Wayne County executive and former sheriff. "We don't know how much of this **mix** is out there, and we don't know how many fentanyl sources there are."

Despite the warnings, many **users** have come to view Suicide as a **drug** they can use occasionally, said Patti, a decade-long **user** from Detroit.

Unlike heroin, addicts don't need to use five or more times a day while they're on fentanyl and don't need a fix as soon as they wake up.

"A lot of people are trying to get their hands on it," she said. "Some people are afraid, but most want to get as high again. ... The heroin around here hasn't been great lately. It's been hit or miss. This is different. The first time I used it, I didn't know what it was. I got high. It was strong."

Part of the appeal is that longtime addicts no longer get high. Instead, heroin merely curbs nausea, tremors, diarrhea and other withdrawal symptoms, said Dr. Mark Greenwald, a Wayne State University psychiatry professor who conducts studies on addicts.

"This is used a lot by **drug** dealers as a kind of marketing," said Garrison Courtney, a DEA spokesman. "They give it an artificial purity. Then people see a few overdose deaths, and they're going to flock to the area to get that brand."

Some do so with **deadly** consequences.

Two weeks ago, Patti said she revived a friend who overdosed on fentanyl and heroin. The woman passed out immediately after injecting. Friends poured ice water on her head, then ice cubes.

She began to turn blue. Desperate, after 15 minutes of failures, Patti said she blew smoke from crack cocaine on her friend and she came to.

Patti said she still uses fentanyl.

"Everyone thinks they can take it," she said. "They're not going to be the ones who are going to go out on it (and die.) I don't think anyone is changing their habits."

The anecdotes seem to confirm the worst fears of **drug** counselors who worried the spate of publicity about the overdoses would increase demand. Public health officials in Wayne County have dispatched **drug** treatment workers and even recovering addicts into some of the city's **drug** -plagued neighborhoods to warn **users** .

"I don't see a lot of people who are nervous about this (outbreak,)" said Shirlie Arrington, a program supervisor at New Light Recovery Center methadone clinic in Detroit. "When you're doing **drugs** , you don't know what you're doing until you get it."

That's the fear of Dominic, a 46-year-old mechanic from Eastpointe, who started using heroin again last year in part because traditional painkillers didn't ease ongoing back problems.

Dominic said he's in such pain from withdrawal that "sometimes I just want to die" but still worries about accidentally taking fentanyl. "I don't know if someone's out to kill you," he said. "I care in that perspective, but I still do (heroin)."

Section: Metro

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Company Name: #keywords2#

Index Terms: DRUG ADDICTION ; DEATHS

Record Number: det24174399

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