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Request to Report Overdoses and Deaths due to Illicitly Obtained Fentanyl

At least 48 overdoses presenting in Sacramento County during March-April 2016, and several in other Northern California counties, including two in San Francisco, are believed to involve illicitly obtained fentanyl, an extremely potent opioid analgesic. The overdoses were caused by pills that the purchasers believed to be the opioid Norco® but actually contained fentanyl; several overdoses in 2015 involved both white powder and counterfeit Xanax® pills containing fentanyl in San Francisco. In response, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has instituted a surveillance effort based on hospital reporting to local public health departments.

Actions requested of San Francisco hospitals and medical providers:

1. **Report overdoses and deaths** suspected or confirmed to be due to illicitly-obtained fentanyl to SFDPH. Obtain a **Confidential Morbidity Report** (www.sfdcp.org/diseasereporting.html), complete the top half and fax it to SFDPH Communicable Disease Control at (415) 554-2848.
2. **Test for fentanyl** when conducting drug screening, by adding it to the panel of substances tested. Positive fentanyl tests in the absence of overdose are not reportable, but can provide an opportunity for providers to educate patients regarding the potential for overdose due to fentanyl.
3. **Improve patient safety**
 - a) **Discourage patients from purchasing pills on the street.**
 - b) **Refer patients with opioid use disorder to treatment.** San Francisco has treatment-on-demand at BAART Turk Street and BAART Market Street methadone clinics close to Civic Center area
 - c) **Ensure patients who may access opioids from the street have naloxone.** Either direct patients to the DOPE Project or prescribe naloxone directly.

Persons who may be exposed to opioids are encouraged to have access to naloxone, a short-acting opioid antagonist that is sprayed intranasally or injected to reverse an overdose. Naloxone is not a controlled substance, can be prescribed by any licensed provider, and can be administered by witnesses as a first aid measure. Naloxone is covered by Medi-Cal, Healthy SF, and most health plans, can be furnished by pharmacists without a prescription, and is available free from the DOPE Project, targeting drug users and their friends and family via syringe exchange sites.

Resources:

- Providers or public can contact the California Poison Control Center at 800-222-1222 with any questions regarding overdose or symptoms after ingesting a pill.
- Treatment Referrals:
 - SFDPH triage center – Treatment Access Program (TAP) @ 1380 Howard St, 8am-4:30pm weekdays
 - BAART Clinic @ 433 Turk St, 7:30-Noon for same day methadone; Tel 415-928-7800 ask for intake counselor
 - List of physicians who provide buprenorphine: http://buprenorphine.samhsa.gov/bwns_locator/
 - DOPE project: contact Eliza Wheeler at wheeler@harmreduction.org or tel. 510-285-2871
- Naloxone prescribing information (scroll down to Naloxone Prescribing, Education, and Awareness): <http://www.sfhealthnetwork.org/employee-physicians/pain-management-resources/>