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Massachusetts State Police

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DRUG SAMPLES TESTED AT STATE POLICE LAB CONFIRMED AS DEADLY OPIOID CARFENTANIL

The Massachusetts State Police Crime Laboratory analyzes substances seized by Massachusetts State Police or other police agencies that are suspected to be illegal narcotics. The samples submitted for testing generally are those found on arrested suspects, purchased by undercover officers, seized during search warrants, or recovered from crime scenes.

In recent weeks, the MSP Crime Laboratory analyzed three samples that tested positive for carfentanil, an extremely dangerous synthetic opioid. Two of the samples confirmed by our lab to be carfentanil were submitted by Brockton Police. The third was submitted by Transit Police, who seized the substance in the Quincy area.

These confirmed tests represent the first, and to date the only, carfentanil that we have seen in Massachusetts. The state of New Hampshire recent confirmed several suspected overdose deaths caused by carfentanil. To date, the Massachusetts State Police are not aware of any carfentanil overdose deaths in our state.

Members of the general public and first responders are urged to be aware of the extreme lethality of carfentanil. Carfentanil can come in many forms, and can be mixed with other drugs or disguised as heroin.

One of the tested samples confirmed as carfentanil by our Crime Laboratory was mixed with cocaine; the others were purely carfentanil. Users of illegal opioids likely would not know if they are ingesting carfentanil just by the appearance of the substance they are taking.

Most carfentanil that has been found in the United States has been produced in Mexico or China. Carfentanil is many many more times more powerful than fentanyl, another synthetic opioid, which in turn is itself many more times potent than heroin. Carfentanil is so powerful that it has been used to sedate elephants weighing many thousands of pounds. It has no legitimate medical uses for humans.

The photo included with this post shows the size of a dose of carfentanil, as compared to a penny, that can be fatal.

Adding additional concern is that carfentanil can be absorbed through the skin via just casual contact, or accidentally inhaled. Through our Commonwealth Fusion Center, the Massachusetts State Police have issued bulletins warning police, firefighters and other first responders of steps they should take to protect themselves from carfentanil, including wearing protective gloves and protective coverings for their mouth and nose.

Carfentanil Facts

- Carfentanil is a Schedule II drug not approved for medical use or human consumption. This drug is traditionally used as a tranquilizer for large animals, such as elephants.

- The majority of illicit carfentanil found in the United States is produced in Mexico and China.

- Carfentanil is approximately 100 times more potent than fentanyl, which can be lethal in the 2-milligram range.

- Carfentanil is a serious danger to the public, first responders, and medical and laboratory personnel. It can be absorbed through the skin or through accidental inhalation of airborne powder.

- Symptoms of exposure include respiratory depression or arrest, drowsiness, disorientation, sedation, pinpoint pupils, and clammy skin. The onset of these symptoms usually occurs within minutes of exposure.

- First responders should avoid field testing suspected fentanyl or a fentanyl-related compound. Only specially trained and outfitted law enforcement professionals should handle any suspect substance, and the appropriate officials within the agency should be notified.

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