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## June 2017 Synthetic Opioid Outbreak in Georgia Highlights the Value of Poison Control Centers for the Rapid Detection of Drug Use Outbreaks

"PCCs are uniquely positioned to serve as the epicenters for the detection of regional clusters and outbreaks," according to an American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) case study of a synthetic opioid exposure outbreak in Georgia. On June 5, 2017, the Georgia Poison Center (GPC) was notified by an emergency department (ED) doctor of five patients with similar respiratory and central nervous system symptoms. This call began a rapid response by the GPC to coordinate with key partners, identify the cause and other potentially related cases, and disseminate information to the public (see figure below). The GPC subsequently learned that all five patients bought what they thought to be Percocet pills from the same illicit drug house earlier the same day. The counterfeit Percocet pills were later found to contain a mixture of two synthetic opioids: U-47700 and cyclopropyl fentanyl, a previously unidentified fentanyl analogue. According to the AAPCC, "by proactively identifying cases of people ingesting counterfeit Percocet and connecting the dots from all these information sources in real-time, the Georgia Poison Center mobilized key partners like the GDPH [Georgia Department of Public Health] and GBI [Georgia Bureau of Investigation] and their resources, and notified the public via the media to halt the outbreak and save lives." More detailed information about the steps taken by the GPC can be found in the AAPCC press release at http://www.aapcc.org/press/79/.

## Timeline of June 2017 Georgia Synthetic Opioid Exposure Outbreak

June 5

- Georgia ED doctor calls GPC to report five patients with similar serious symptoms who all had taken what they believed were Percocet tablets.
- GPC reviews all similar poison center cases taken in the past 48 hours and contacts EDs in five regional hospitals. Within two and a half hours, the number of identified cases increase to 15.

- GPC notifies numerous agencies, including the GDPH, GBI crime laboratory, the Department of Justice, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.
- GDPH and GPC draft and release media message to make the public and other stakeholders aware of the situation.

June 6

• GPC provides clinical updates to the media, the GBI fields criminal and laboratory-related questions, and GDPH manages other media inquiries.

June 7

- GBI crime laboratory begins to analyze the confiscated pills.
- GPC and GDPH develops and disseminates to Georgia hospitals guidelines for specimen collection, transport, and testing of samples. GPC established as the coordinating center for case reporting.

June 8 & 9

- GBI lab analysis finds pills contain a mixture of two synthetic opioids: U-47700 and cyclopropyl fentanyl, a previously unidentified fentanyl analogue.
- As of August 4th, the number of successfully identified cases associated with this outbreak had reached 48, including six unconfirmed deaths.

June 13

Source: American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC), June 2017 Deadly Novel Synthetic Opioid Exposure Outbreak in Georgia – A Case Study in the Crucial Surveillance Role of Regional Poison Control Centers, AAPCC Press Release, June 20, 2017; and GPC, Personal Communication, August 4, 2017.