



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**
Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH
Commissioner

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**HEALTH DEPARTMENT WARNS NEW YORKERS ABOUT COCAINE LACED
WITH FENTANYL; OCCASIONAL USERS AT HIGH RISK OF OVERDOSE**

*In 2016, 37 percent of overdose deaths involved cocaine
and fentanyl without heroin, up from 11 percent in 2015*

*Last year more than 1,300 New Yorkers died of a drug overdose, and
nearly half (44 percent) of those deaths involved fentanyl*

June 1, 2017 – The Health Department today announced that fentanyl is being increasingly found in cocaine-involved overdose deaths. Fentanyl, an opioid 50 to 100 times more powerful than morphine, is being mixed in illicit drugs – often without the buyer’s knowledge. The presence of fentanyl in any illicit drug, including cocaine, increases the risk of overdose. In 2016, 37 percent of overdose deaths involved cocaine and fentanyl without heroin, up from 11 percent in 2015. In 2016, nearly half (44 percent) of all overdose deaths involved fentanyl, up from 16 percent in 2015. The Health Department also issued a Health Advisory to 40,000 medical professionals with information on how to educate patients, particularly those who may use cocaine occasionally, about the increased overdose risk posed by fentanyl. In April, Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray announced HealingNYC, the City’s comprehensive initiative to reduce opioid overdose deaths by 35 percent over five years. The City is investing \$38 million annually at full ramp-up to increase naloxone distribution and community-based trainings, expand access to medication assisted treatment, promote judicious opioid prescribing and a range of public safety measures.

“All New Yorkers who use drugs, even if only occasionally, should know their drugs may be mixed with fentanyl,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett**. “Opioid overdose deaths are preventable. We encourage all New Yorkers who use drugs to take harm reduction measures and equip themselves and their friends and family with naloxone.”

Last week, the Health Department coordinated a [two-day opioid outreach campaign](#) to advise people about the risks associated with fentanyl and provide key safety messages directed to people who use drugs, even if only occasionally. The department also announced the [“I Saved a Life” awareness campaign](#) to show New Yorkers that they can help save lives by learning about overdose prevention and by carrying and using naloxone. The City launched a free mobile app, [“Stop OD NYC,”](#) which teaches New Yorkers how to recognize and reverse an overdose with naloxone and links individuals to nearby community-based programs and pharmacies where naloxone is available without a prescription.

In 2016, more than 1,300 New Yorkers died of a drug overdose, and about 80 percent of those deaths were due to opioids, including prescription painkillers, heroin and fentanyl. More New Yorkers die from drug overdose than homicides, suicides, and motor vehicle crashes combined.

“The destruction wrought by substance use disorder in our state is horrific; it's reaching pandemic levels with overdose deaths outpacing traffic deaths. Fentanyl-laced cocaine is the latest front in this battle, and increased public consciousness of this new and growing threat is imperative,” said **Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D/WF- Manhattan), Chair of the New York State Assembly Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse**. “A full arsenal of improved harm reduction training and treatment is needed, and everyone must be made aware that drugs in circulation may contain this lethal opioid.”

“We need to educate New Yorkers on all the dangers of drug use and the factors that lead to a higher risk of deadly overdose,” said **Council Member Andrew Cohen**. “Deaths from drug overdoses are preventable. We should be using our resources to inform people exactly what they’re putting into their bodies, how it can affect them, and how to avoid a deadly overdose.”

Opioid overdose deaths are preventable. The Health Department funds regular naloxone trainings, which teach New Yorkers to recognize the signs of an overdose and respond by calling 911 and administering naloxone. The trainings are free, and all participants receive a free naloxone kit. Treatment with methadone or buprenorphine can also reduce risk of overdose.

New Yorkers can get [naloxone](#) without a prescription at [over 740 pharmacies](#) throughout the city, including all major chain pharmacies (Walgreens, Duane Reade, Rite Aid and CVS) and at registered [opioid overdose programs](#). Individuals seeking support or treatment for substance use issues for themselves or their loved ones can contact NYC Well by calling 1-888-NYC-WELL, texting “WELL” to 65173 or going to nyc.gov/nycwell. Free, confidential support is available at any hour of the day in over 200 languages.

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