



San Francisco Department of Public Health

Barbara A. Garcia, MPA
Director of Health

City and County of San Francisco
Mark Farrell
Mayor

Death of three men overnight likely drug related *Health officials concerned about possible fentanyl poisoning* Urge safety and precautions for drug users

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Rachael Kagan 415 554-2507 or 415 420-5017 cell, rachael.kagan@sfdph.org

SAN FRANCISCO (February 22, 2018) -- Three men were found dead this morning at approximately 4:30am on Page Street, and the Medical Examiner is investigating the deaths as drug related. The deaths do not appear to be due to cold weather, and the San Francisco Police Department, which responded to the scene, said that foul play is not suspected. The men were found outside of The Urban School of San Francisco, and are not associated with the school, according to school officials.

Though the cause of death will not be determined today, the Health Department is concerned about the possibility of fentanyl poisoning, and is alerting health care providers and the drug user community about the dangers of fentanyl and how to take precautions.

“People who buy drugs on the street are at risk of purchasing drugs contaminated by fentanyl, which is a very strong opioid, much more potent than heroin,” said Dr. Tomas Aragon, San Francisco Health Officer. “It is essential for their safety to carry naloxone in case of overdose. It is a matter of life and death.”

Fentanyl is an extremely potent, short-acting opioid that can cause overdose and death. It is often used to cut other drugs. Fentanyl has been increasingly present in street drugs in San Francisco, including methamphetamine, cocaine, benzodiazepines (including Xanax), prescription opioids and heroin. Consumers may be unaware that they have purchased fentanyl, which puts them in danger of overdose or death, since the dosing levels are significantly different.

Fentanyl is clearly present in the drug supply, and the death rate is rising. In 2016, 22 people in San Francisco died of fentanyl overdose, double the number in 2015. Of these cases, 45 percent also involved methamphetamine, 27 percent cocaine, and 41 percent another opioid. There were a total of 105 deaths from opioid overdoses in San Francisco in 2016, including the fentanyl deaths.

In San Francisco, fentanyl was found in counterfeit Xanax pills that led to three overdoses requiring hospitalization and one death in the community in October 2015. In another episode in May 2017, fentanyl was found in crack cocaine that was smoked and caused three overdoses requiring hospitalization and one death in the community.



San Francisco Department of Public Health

Barbara A. Garcia, MPA
Director of Health

City and County of San Francisco
Mark Farrell
Mayor

The use of naloxone (Narcan) to respond to overdoses is a key harm reduction strategy in San Francisco that has saved many lives. In 2016, there were 883 overdose reversals in the community, meaning naloxone was administered by drug users or their friends to save a life. Police, paramedics, physicians and staff of community organizations that serve people who use drugs also are equipped with naloxone.

Fentanyl poisoning works more quickly than other opioids, and naloxone is essential to reverse the effects. All consumers of street drugs should carry naloxone for their own safety, and the safety of others. Naloxone is covered by Medi-Cal, Healthy San Francisco, and most health plans. It can be furnished by pharmacists registered to do so without a prescription.

Naloxone can be obtained from the CBHS Pharmacy at 1380 Howard on walk-in basis with no prescription required, Monday-Friday 9:30am-4pm. Naloxone is also available at no cost from the DOPE (Drug Overdose Prevention and Education) Project, at syringe access sites and other community-based programs.

San Francisco's syringe access sites provide fentanyl test strips so that people can check the content of their drugs before consuming. Fentanyl test strips also are available at no charge at these locations:

- Glide Harm Reduction Services, 330 Ellis, 5th Floor, (b/w Jones & Taylor): Monday-Friday, 12-5pm
- 6th Street Harm Reduction Center, 117 6th Street (@ Minna): Monday – Friday, 10am – 7pm

Top safety messages for people who use drugs

- Carry naloxone (Narcan) to reverse overdose
- Try a tester dose first to make sure drugs work as expected and are not spiked
- Don't use drugs alone, and stagger use in a group so that someone is always alert to help others if needed
- Test drugs for fentanyl with tester strips

###