

Fatal fentanyl reaches Hastings Prince Edward

By Sarah Sobanski

Illegal fentanyl has been identified in Hastings and Prince Edward counties.

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health has released that fentanyl and other illicit drugs containing it have been found in and around the region. The health unit is warning that the drug could increase the rate of fatal overdoses.

"We've had confirmation with even our staff working with high-risk populations here," said public health resident medical officer of health Dr. Piotr Oglaza. "These types of counterfeit pills that are laced with fentanyl are already in our communities." It's urged that anyone that takes illicit substances and believes to have consumed fentanyl seek medical help and substance abuse advice, and also perhaps look into something similar to this Bristol drug testing service to clearly identify what substances have been ingested.

However, if people don't live near that testing facility, they could consider getting hold of a marquis test kit to see similar results. They could find out what illegal substances have been taken. This should put the individual's mind at rest, especially if they think they've taken some extremely dangerous substances.

"Quinte West OPP have made seizures of fentanyl and other illegal drugs in our area, and we assume fentanyl-laced drugs are in surrounding communities," said Quinte West OPP Inspector Christina Reive in a press release by the health unit. "Street drugs such as cocaine, crystal meth, heroin and marijuana can be laced or cut with illicit fentanyl without the user's knowledge. It can also be sold as fake prescription drugs (e.g., Percocet or OxyContin). Abuse or unintentional use of legal or illicit drugs can lead to needless death. All residents need to be aware of the risks and symptoms of overdose, and know how to respond."

Fentanyl is extremely potent even in small doses. It is 100 times stronger than morphine. Public health said an amount of illicit fentanyl as small as a grain of salt could be fatal and people could be unaware that they're consuming it if it is disguised as other drugs.

"These pills put our kids at a really grave risk. Kids who may be thinking about reaching for a pill at a party," Oglaza explained it's important parents warn their children that fentanyl may be in our communities. "The decision to reach and take a pill, an unknown pill from an unknown source at the party, could really result in very serious consequences including death."

Fact sheets for parents looking to talk to their kids about the dangers of drugs are available on the health unit's website.

"If they take that pill, the amount of even the smallest amount of fentanyl because it's so potent could result in fatal overdose... Very little dose could result in somebody falling asleep, becoming unresponsive and then their breathing may stop. That's basically the mechanism in which an overdose and death occurs. It's making a person fall asleep and blocking the mechanism that's responsible for breathing."

The health unit is also asking local residents to know the signs of overdose. Someone who may be experiencing an overdose might not wake up easily or at all. They may stop breathing or breathe slowly or erratically. Their fingernails or lips may turn blue. Their body may be limp. Look out for pin-point pupils, vomiting, deep snoring or gurgling.

It's also warning opioid users to always use with someone else, tell someone where you are and to check on you if you use alone, use slowly and in tiny doses. Also have a medication to reverse an overdose on hand - the health unit provides Lifesaver kits.

"They pose a really grave risk to those who might they might be reaching and using them so we highly recommend and advise not to use any drugs purchased on the street," said Oglaza. "If somebody uses these type of drugs we really urge and recommend to not do that alone and have close access to a Naloxone kit. The Naloxone kit can be obtained from our public health offices as well as there's a list of pharmacies posted on our website. These pharmacies are providing Naloxone free of charge to all those who need them."

In case of an overdose call 9-1-1, administer Lifesaver kits - available through the health unit - and stay and wait for paramedics with the individual.

"It is very scary and that's why we are sending these notices," said Oglaza. "We are hoping that these important conversations will take place and that they will take place as soon as possible and our community will be best prepared to face this."