



Deadly Drug Used to Sedate Elephants Has Hit the Streets

A drug so powerful that it is normally used to tranquilize large animals like elephants has turned up in the streets of Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Kentucky, and Florida. The drug, carfentanil, is thought to be the cause for a record spike in drug overdoses there. It can be manufactured inexpensively and easily laced with other drugs such as heroin. Officials in Ohio have declared this a public health emergency, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) warns that communities everywhere should be on alert about this dangerous drug.

Carfentanil is a synthetic opioid in the same drug class as heroin, fentanyl, and prescription drugs like Oxycodone. The drug is so strong that just a few granules the size of grains of table salt can be lethal. It is 100 times more potent than fentanyl, the prescription painkiller which led to the recent death of the pop star, Prince.

In the past few years, drug traffickers increasingly substituted fentanyl for heroin and other opioids. But now carfentanil, which the DEA says is most probably imported illicitly from China, is being sold on American streets, either mixed with heroin or pressed into pills that look like prescription drugs. Many users don't realize that they are buying carfentanil, and this has led to deadly consequences.

"Instead of having four or five overdoses in a day, we're seeing 20, 30, 40, maybe even 50," said Tom Synan, Chief of Police in Newtown, Ohio, and who also directs the Hamilton County Heroin Coalition Task Force in Southwest Ohio. Synan said in a NPR article that carfentanil turned up in Cincinnati in July, and that the number of overdoses has overwhelmed first responders.

Hamilton County Health Commissioner Tim Ingram further explained in the same article that, "It can take hours for the body to metabolize carfentanil, far longer than for other opioids. That means a longer-lasting high. But it also means that when someone overdoses, it is more difficult to revive them with naloxone, the emergency medication used to block the effects of opioids." Ingram has received reports that emergency rooms are using two or three doses to bring people back, and therefore are trying to distribute a more concentrated version of naloxone.

There is no approved human use for carfentanil, and in fact, it is highly restricted even for veterinarians, who can use it legally only to [sedate large animals](#). First responders and emergency room workers are being told to wear protective gloves and masks because carfentanil is so potent, that it can be dangerous to someone who simply touches or inhales it.

Learn more about the abuse of this drug:

CBS News' [Dozens of Ohio Overdoses blamed on heroin mixed with elephant tranquilizer](#)

Business Insider.com's [Opioid Crisis Report](#)