



OHIO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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John R. Kasich/Governor

Richard Hodges/Director of Health

August 26, 2015

John Halpin MD, MPH
Medical Officer
PDO Surveillance and Epi Team
Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention/CDC
4770 Buford Hwy NE, MS F-62 Atlanta, GA 30341

Dear Dr. Halpin:

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is investigating an increase in fentanyl related overdose deaths. According to preliminary data, there were 500 fentanyl-related unintentional overdose deaths in 2014. This is a marked increase from previous years. In 2013, there were a total 84 fentanyl-related unintentional drug poisoning deaths. The fentanyl-related poisoning deaths observed in 2014 accounted for 20% of all drug poisoning deaths in Ohio. In comparison, fentanyl-related overdose deaths in 2013 represented less than 4% of unintentional drug poisonings. Identifying the circumstances and factors that are contributing to this increase in deaths is critical to implementing specific interventions that can be targeted to address this issue and to prevent additional deaths.

We are requesting technical assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist ODH in investigating this increase in overdose deaths associated with fentanyl in Ohio. This investigation might include a variety of activities we are in the process of defining, all of which will remain under the direction and supervision of the ODH. The primary goal for the investigation is to characterize the population experiencing fatal fentanyl overdoses and identify key risk factors for fentanyl fatal overdoses that can be targeted for prevention efforts. Secondary goals may be identified that could include recommendations for enhancements of surveillance and identification of drug overdose outbreaks. The state and local health departments do not have the current capacity to implement the needed intense surveillance to collect and analyze the additional data needed to understand this problem. The Ohio Department of Health will retain ownership of all data collected.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary DiOrio, MD, MPH
Medical Director
State Epidemiologist