

Often-prescribed painkiller deadly in Erie County

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6:43 PM, Feb 13, 2015

8:30 AM, Feb 15, 2015

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Erie County Health department says a drug that's stronger and more lethal than heroin is killing people in alarming numbers.

In the first 10 months of 2014, 120 people died from drug overdoses in Erie County and 102 of those deaths involved opioid drugs like heroin, which became more deadly when mixed with Fentanyl or cocaine.

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First responders can reverse the effects of an overdose with a life-saving dose of Narcan.

"You take it out, you put it together and then you can just spray it into somebody's nose," Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein.

But first responders are now battling something even stronger and deadlier than heroin alone.

Drug dealers and users are lacing heroin with the narcotic painkiller Fentanyl and sometimes using it alone in powder form in deadly doses.

"Fentanyl is much more potent than heroin. Fifty to 100 times more potent. And it's also less expensive so it's a great deal for people who are dealing drugs because they can use less and still get a high or a larger high for a lower price," said Dr. Burstein.

But that price just might be their life.

The Erie County Medical Examiner's Office says the number of Fentanyl-related deaths has skyrocketed over the past month.

Local police departments are seeing it, too. Cheektowaga Police Chief David Zack says his officers have saved close to half a dozen lives since officers started carrying Narcan less than a year ago.

"We do have five documented cases where we were able to revive someone who had overdosed," said Zack.

You don't have to be a first responder or police officer to carry Narcan. If you know someone who uses heroin or other opiates you can ask a medical provider to prescribe Narcan and keep it in your house.

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