

# Opioid forum held at Maryvale High School

By **Jim Herr** - April 20, 2018



*Erie County Commissioner of Health Dr. Gale R. Burstein speaks at an Opioid forum at Maryvale High School on April 19th. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)*

CHEEKTOWAGA – Erie County is poised to see a reduction in Opioid-related deaths compared to other parts of the state according to Erie County Commissioner of Health Dr. Gale R. Burstein.

“We believe when all the overdose deaths are confirmed, we’ll have at least a 20 percent reduction in the number of Opioid-related overdose deaths in 2017 compared to 2016,” said Dr. Burstein.

She was one of five speakers who spoke about the local impact of the Opioid Epidemic at a public forum hosted by Assemblymember Monica Wallace Thursday evening at Maryvale High School.

Dr. Burstein says Fentanyl – a powerful Opioid – is the leading cause of overdose deaths. The drug is legally obtainable by prescription and is used in injection, patch, or lozenges form.

“When it is made illegally as a synthetic Opioid, they’re making it look like bath salts – these large grains of salt. If you take just a couple of these grains, you’ll

overdose and die. It's 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine," said Dr. Burstein.

Drug dealers are cutting Fentanyl into Heroin to up their product's potency and price – with deadly consequences.

"There is no quality assurance when they're mixing these batches, and some batches have a lot of heroin and not a lot of Fentanyl, and some batches have a lot of Fentanyl," added Dr. Burstein. "People could be buying the same amount from the same dealer every week and it's really Russian Roulette."

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The county's Health Department also warns that they see a rise of counterfeit pills laced with Fentanyl.

The Cheektowaga Police Department partnered with the county last year to create an Overdose Prevention Through Follow-up Initiative. A police officer and a counselor will visit the home of a resident who overdosed within a day of the incident to talk with the person about what happened. They teach them about Narcan and also speak about medication-assisted treatment programs.

"The Cheektowaga Police Department remains committed to doing all that we can to assist our residents who are affected by this opiate epidemic," said Lt. Brian Gould. "We will continue to use the unique experience that our officers have gained responding to these emergencies to provide all the possible assistance we can and to collaboratively develop new programs that will help to eliminate this epidemic."