



News Release

John R. Kasich/ Governor
Richard Hodges/ Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 3, 2016

Contacts: ODH Office of Communications (614) 644-8562
OhioMHAS Office of Communications (614) 728-5090

Medical Examiner's Finding that Prince Died from Fentanyl Overdose Underscores Rise of Drug Nationally and Importance of Naloxone

COLUMBUS – A medical examiner's report that the musician Prince died from an accidental, self-administered overdose of fentanyl underscores the rise of the dangerous drug across the country including in Ohio. It also a reminder that family and friends of people who use drugs should carry the life-saving opiate overdose reversal drug naloxone to administer during an overdose while waiting on first-responders to arrive.

Like other states nationwide, Ohio has seen a major increase in overdose deaths involving fentanyl, a synthetic narcotic used to treat severe pain that in its prescription form is estimated to be 30 to 50 times more potent than heroin. Non-pharmaceutical fentanyl, which is illegally made, is often mixed with heroin and/or cocaine and shipped to the U.S. Ohio had 503 fentanyl-related overdose deaths in 2014 compared to 84 in 2013. Authorities have not said how Prince obtained the drug, including whether it was a prescribed medication. Fentanyl also is produced illicitly and shipped into the U.S.

Some people who use drugs seek out fentanyl while others may not know when illicit fentanyl has been combined with other drugs like heroin, and they can overdose and die quickly, according to Ohio Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Mary DiOrio.

"We strongly encourage family and friends of people who use drugs, especially heroin, to obtain and carry naloxone," Dr. DiOrio said. "The use of naloxone as quickly as possible is vital to saving lives during all opiate overdoses – but it is especially critical during overdoses involving fentanyl because it can kill quickly. And because of its toxicity, fentanyl overdoses may require more than one dose of naloxone, so it's critical to call 911 immediately."

People can get naloxone without a prescription from participating pharmacies which carry naloxone and through Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided With Naloxone) community programs. Go to stopoverdoses.ohio.gov for more information. Other pharmacies may order naloxone upon request.

ODH and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services launched a targeted campaign in early May to raise awareness about the signs of a drug overdose and to urge family members and friends of people who use drugs to obtain naloxone. The campaign focuses on 15 counties that accounted for 80 percent of Ohio's fentanyl-related overdose deaths in 2014.

Ohio's fight against opiate abuse and overdoses during the past five years has included many [initiatives](#) to save lives by expanding the availability and use of naloxone. The current two-year state budget provides \$1 million to purchase naloxone for distribution to first-responders through local health departments. Gov. John R. Kasich has proposed in the state's mid-biennium review to expand access to naloxone by allowing entities that regularly interact with high-risk individuals, such as treatment centers, halfway homes and schools, to carry naloxone without a distributor license from the Ohio Board of Pharmacy.

Substance abuse prevention experts say the fentanyl threat also underscores the importance of talking to young people about the risks associated with drug use. Through Ohio's Start Talking! www.StartTalking.ohio.gov, statewide youth drug prevention initiative, parents and other caregivers can sign up to receive free, email tips to help them learn how prevent drug abuse before it starts. Studies show that frequent, ongoing conversations can reduce the likelihood of kids starting down a path to drug addiction by 50 percent.

Learn more about fentanyl [here](#).

###