

OVERDOSE RESPONSE STRATEGY

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Public Health and Safety Alert: Carfentanil in Connecticut

Connecticut Overdose Response Strategy Team (CT-ORS team)

August 2, 2024

Carfentanil is an extremely potent synthetic opioid, primarily used as a tranquilizer for large animals. It is estimated to be approximately 100 times more powerful than fentanyl and about 10,000 times stronger than morphine. Due to its high potency, even in trace amounts it can be lethal to humans, making it a significant concern in the illicit drug market and posing severe risks to public health and safety.^{1,2}

Since July of 2023, the CT-ORS team has been monitoring the presence of carfentanil in the illicit drug environment across Connecticut, New York and the New England region. The ORS teams and our public health and safety partners are reporting an increase in the prevalence of carfentanil.

Connecticut:

July – December 2023:

- 3 fatal overdoses in New Haven county
- 2 fatal overdoses in Fairfield county
- 1 fatal overdose in Windham county
- 1 fatal overdose in Litchfield county
- 2 law enforcement seizures

January – July 2024*:

- 1 fatal overdose in Middlesex county
- 1 fatal overdose in Fairfield county

New York City (NYC):

Between March 2024 and June 2024, the New York City (NYC) Department of Health's drug-checking program identified carfentanil in eight samples. NYC Department of Health's Bureau of Vital Statistics and NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner report seven fatal overdoses from carfentanil between January - June 2024, as well as three fatal overdoses in 2023.

New York State:

New York State Department of Health reported that central New York has detected carfentanil in two samples through their community drug checking program. Both samples were collected in May 2024.

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Massachusetts:

Massachusetts State Police, Forensic Services Division reported that they have detected carfentanil in six law enforcement seizures since September 2023. Law enforcement in Essex County is also reporting that there have been two confirmed fatal overdoses in 2024 in which carfentanil was detected.

Rhode Island:

Rhode Island State Fusion Center reported that the Rhode Island Forensic Drug Chemistry Laboratory has detected carfentanil in at least two law enforcement seizures in 2024.

New Hampshire:

New Hampshire Information and Analysis Center (NHIAC) reported that the New Hampshire State Police Forensic Laboratory detected carfentanil in two law enforcement seizures in November 2023 and May 2024. NHIAC also reported that the New Hampshire Office of Chief Medical Examiner detected carfentanil in two fatal overdoses in 2024.

This uptick in carfentanil incidents and fatal overdoses is occurring across the United States. On July 22, 2024, Microsoft News (MSN) reported that Sedgwick County, Kansas identified carfentanil in four fatal overdoses in the past three months. Preliminary data for 2023 from the CDC State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS), which contains fatal overdose data from 50 U.S. states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico, show 150 documented fatal overdoses involving carfentanil compared to 20 in the prior year.

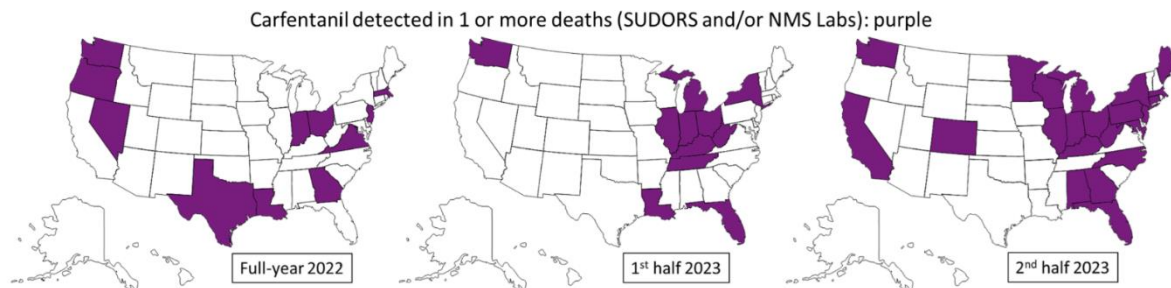


Figure 1

*As noted, 2nd half 2023 data are incomplete; there might be additional states with carfentanil detected among overdose deaths that are not yet available in our data.

The CT-ORS team is advising public health, law enforcement and first responders about the alarming situation highlighted by ORS teams reporting from surrounding states, CT-specific data and the 2023 CDC SUDORS data. The data reveals carfentanil-related fatal overdoses not only within CT but in neighboring states and key areas that significantly influence CT's illicit drug environment, including NYC, New Jersey and Philadelphia, PA. This widespread presence stresses the urgent need for heightened awareness and coordinated response efforts to address the growing threat of carfentanil in our region. The CT-ORS team continues to work with our federal, state and local public safety and public health partners in monitoring CT's illicit drug environment and will update accordingly.

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If you or your agency suspect that you have encountered carfentanil or a carfentanil-related overdose, please contact the CT-ORS team immediately.

The CT-ORS team strongly advises all public health, harm reduction and others working with individuals who use opioids to educate them about the dangers of fentanyl. In addition, they should assist their clients with obtaining the proper precautions if they will be using opioids. We strongly advise anyone that is using substances obtained illicitly to be aware of the signs of an opioid overdose, avoid using alone and have naloxone on hand. If you or someone you are with is experiencing an overdose, call 911 immediately.

Resources

Harm Reduction services are community-based programs that traditionally support persons using substances and are available to assist first responders after an overdose occurs. They can provide and link individuals who experienced an overdose to other important services, programs and outreach. Please use the following link to find harm reduction services available in your area: [syringeservicesprogram.pdf \(ct.gov\)](https://www.ct.gov/syringeservicesprogram.pdf)

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For more information about the ORS program, visit the website: www.ORSprogram.org

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Sources:

*These are numbers as of 07/29/2024 but are subject to change due to fatal cases pending confirmatory toxicology results.

¹ Carfentanil: Uses, Interactions, Mechanism of Action | DrugBank Online

² National Institute on Drug Abuse

State of Connecticut Department of Public Health Department

State of Connecticut Office of Chief Medical Examiner

State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Service and Public Protection, Division of Scientific Services

The Overdose Response Strategy

New England High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Health Advisory 2024 # 20

New York State Department of Health Issues Public Health Alert for Carfentanil Detected In Drug Samples From Central New York ([ny.gov](https://www.ny.gov))

New Hampshire Information and Analysis Center product # 2024 – 06360

2024 ORS Monthly Bulletin 6, Rhode Island State Fusion Center

CDC SUDORS

Figure 1: Update on drug overdose deaths with carfentanil detected, CDC, May 2024