



**MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICERS'  
NEWSLETTER  
No. 283**

**Office of the  
Chief Medical  
Health Officer**

February 8, 2017

To: Emergency Departments, Overdose Prevention Sites and other Front Line Service Providers

Dear Colleagues,

**Carfentanil has been definitively confirmed in the drug supply on Vancouver Island.**

LifeLabs laboratory found carfentanil in a urine sample from a treatment facility on Vancouver Island in early February.

On February 7, RCMP in Nanaimo confirmed carfentanil was present in a substance seized in the course of a search warrant executed in Nanaimo.

Carfentanil is a synthetic opioid normally used as a sedative for large animals like elephants. It is similar to fentanyl but can be 100 times more toxic; one or two grains the size of salt grains can be fatal to humans.

As there is no reliable way for people to know with certainty if fentanyl, carfentanil or other potentially toxic components are in illicit drugs, the overdose response interventions remain the same. However, in a case where the overdose is due to carfentanil, larger quantities of naloxone will have to be administered and responders should ensure adequate supplies are on site.

The confirmed presence of this highly toxic drug reinforces the need to counsel anyone using any illicit drugs to follow basic harm reduction measures. These include:

- Never using alone;
- Having naloxone and a sober person trained in its use readily available;
- Using an overdose prevention service or supervised-consumption service wherever possible; and
- Knowing the signs of an overdose and calling 911 immediately.

For tips to prevent or reduce an overdose, visit: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/overdose/what-you-need-to-know/tips-to-prevent-overdose>.

For more resources and links related to overdose and substance use, visit: [www.viha.ca/mho/overdose](http://www.viha.ca/mho/overdose).

Sincerely,

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