



**SUBSTANCE ABUSE ADVISORY
WV004**

TO: All law enforcement agencies, WV Office of Emergency Medical Services, Hospitals, Local Health Departments, WV DHHR, and other agencies as appropriate

FROM: Elizabeth J. Scharman, Pharm.D., DABAT, BCPS, FAACT; Director, West Virginia Poison Center

DATE: June 20, 2016

DISTRIBUTION: As deemed appropriate on a need to know basis

Potential for Counterfeit Xanax Tablets in WV: May Contain Fentanyl

There have been reports of counterfeit Xanax tablets (described as Xanax bars labeled as 2 mg strength) in the United States (Florida, Illinois, Ohio, and others). Although the tablets look like brand name Xanax tablets, they have been documented as containing fentanyl; a synthetic opioid stated to be 50 times more potent than heroin. The counterfeit tablets are thinner in appearance; however, one would have to be familiar with the actual tablets to notice the difference.

Xanax is a brand name for alprazolam, a benzodiazepine drug with sedating and anti-anxiety properties. Xanax is a scheduled drug, C-IV.

Unconfirmed But Potential for Counterfeit Tablets in WV

In the last 10 days, the WV Poison Center has been notified about 3 cases in which the presenting signs and symptoms were consistent with an opioid overdose (all given naloxone). However, upon awakening, the victim insisted that they had taken Xanax. In one additional case, the victim was told he was surreptitiously given Xanax; however, the effects reported were not consistent with a benzodiazepine exposure.

Additionally, the WV Poison Center has received 2 pill identification calls in both May and June 2016 concerning Xanax 2 mg. In contrast, only 3 pill identification calls in calendar year 2015 were related to Xanax 2 mg.

Recommendation:

If a victim suspected of an opiate/opioid overdose is revived with naloxone and/or supported breathing and subsequently claims to have taken Xanax, and not an opiate/opioid, consider the possibility of counterfeit Xanax. Please make sure to report the case to the WV Poison Center so that surveillance can be conducted.

If there are any tablets remaining, attempt to obtain them. The WV Poison Center will work to ensure that the remaining tablets can be sent off for analysis. This information is needed to confirm the presence of this deadly counterfeit medication in West Virginia.

This message was directly distributed by the West Virginia Poison Center on behalf of the Substance Abuse Early Warning Network (a product of the WV State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup and the WV Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities). Receiving entities are responsible for further dissemination of the information as appropriate to the target audience.

Message Categories:

Network Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance, warrants immediate action or attention.

Network Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation.

Network Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation.