

- Bureau of Motor Vehicles
- Emergency Management Agency
- **Emergency Medical Services**
- Office of Criminal Justice Services
- Ohio Homeland Security
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- Ohio State Highway Patrol



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To: Ohio EMS providers, EMS medical directors, and EMS agencies  
From: Carol A. Cunningham, M.D., FAAEM, FAEMS  
State Medical Director  
Date: August 30, 2018  
RE: Preventative Measures for Fentanyl Exposure

The national opioid crisis continues to challenge all of the communities in our nation and every sector within our healthcare, law enforcement, and first responder networks. The event that occurred at the Ross Correctional Institution in Chillicothe, Ohio on August 29, 2018, as well as a similar concern at the State Correctional Institution at Albion in Pennsylvania, highlights the need for preparation, training, situational awareness, and vigilance for medical and non-medical first responders and law enforcement personnel.

There remains a paucity of quality research on high-potency opioids in the powdered form. As these synthetic compounds are primarily illegally produced, the concentration and composition of these substances are variable and unpredictable. The greatest risk from the powdered form of high-potency opioids is exposure via the inhalation or intravenous routes followed by exposure and absorption through mucous membranes. The risk of significant exposure with clinical symptoms is minimal through dermal exposure if the skin is intact. Although multiple organizations have presented various recommendations regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) for fentanyl, the common thread is nitrile gloves, a properly fitted NIOSH-approved respirator, and eye protection.

Unrelated to yesterday's events in Ohio, an informational video, *Fentanyl: The Real Deal*, a collaborative project released by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection in partnership with multiple federal and national organizations and stakeholders, was released today to support the law enforcement and first responder community. The video includes recommendations for fentanyl exposures and dispels some of the myths associated with these substances. The video can be accessed through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Yc9ISaSKIs>. In addition, the White House recently released fentanyl safety recommendations that can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Final%20STANDARD%20size%20of%20Fentanyl%20Safety%20Recommendations%20for%20First%20Respond....pdf>.

The prevention of dermal exposure can be achieved by wearing long-sleeved shirts and full-length pants. If these items of clothing are not available, a gown that covers the exposed skin should be donned. An important preventative measure that is highlighted in these newly released informational materials is that soap and water should be used to remove the powder from the

#### **Mission Statement**

*"to save lives, reduce injuries and economic loss, to administer Ohio's motor vehicle laws and to preserve the safety and well being of all citizens with the most cost-effective and service-oriented methods available."*

skin and to avoid touching the eyes, mouth, or other mucous membranes which includes ingesting food or drink until one has been completely decontaminated. Hand sanitizers should not be used as these cleansing products may increase the penetration of the high-potency opioid into the skin.

These events also present another opportunity for Ohio EMS to serve as leaders and role models in a time of crisis similar to the successes that we previously demonstrated during the H1N1 influenza vaccination campaign and other challenges overcome by the State of Ohio. While EMS personnel are well versed in the proper donning and doffing of PPE, other first responders who don PPE less frequently may not be as experienced. The Ohio Department of Health is distributing training videos on PPE and other measures to our law enforcement community; however, I encourage EMS personnel to provide our public safety partners with assistance in the performance of these potentially life-saving measures including, but not limited to, live training. I also encourage you to share the naloxone administration training materials for non-medical responders that are available from the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS (<http://www.ems.ohio.gov/education-naloxone-non-med.aspx>) with our partners in public safety and provide or assist them in the identification of CPR training and other naloxone administration training resources.

It is imperative that we continue to eliminate any silos that remain between EMS and our partners in healthcare and law enforcement especially in the scenarios of crisis. We are all in this together. The incidence of opioid overdoses typically increases during holidays, and it is highly likely that the same substances involved in the event at the Ross Correctional Institution are available and circulating in our communities. We must continue to don our PPE, be prepared, maintain situational awareness, and be well-trained to effectively respond as a team and to ensure that everyone on our team goes home safely today and every day.

Thank you for your dedicated service to the residents and visitors to Ohio and for your dedicated service to Ohio EMS.