

## Lowell officials: Fentanyl turning up in cocaine

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LOWELL -- The source of opioid overdoses have started to emerge from unexpected places within the Mill City limits. During the Opioid Epidemic Task Force meeting at City Hall on Monday, it was revealed there has been an increase in opioid-related overdoses in which individuals reported they had been using cocaine and not opioids.

"Due to these reports, we feel confident saying that fentanyl is being added to cocaine in our area," stated a letter composed by Lainnie Emond, substance-abuse coordinator for the Lowell Health and Human Services Department. "This contamination has led to unexpected and unintentional fatal and nonfatal opioid-related overdoses."

During the monthly meeting, comprised of law, health and other area organizations impacted by substance abuse and addiction, a story was shared involving a man who purchased cocaine within Lowell and consumed it in his car. He went unresponsive and was later revived with Narcan by emergency crews.

The specific number of opioid-related overdoses due to those thinking they were only consuming cocaine were not available.

However, numbers released by Jon Kelley, director of communications and IT at Trinity Emergency Medical Service during Monday's meeting, show there were 56 opioid related illness calls received by emergency crews in Lowell during April.

According to the Trinity data, the majority of those opioid related illness calls came from downtown, with 15 such calls. The next highest call volumes included 10 from Centralville, seven from the Acre, and six from the Lower Highlands.

The numbers showed that of those 56 calls in April, 30 were priority one calls.

According to Kelley, priority one patients are classified as dead or within approximately five minutes of being dead due to an opioid overdose and necessitate being revived with Narcan.

"One person a day is saved by Narcan within the city limits," Kelley said.

So far in 2018, there have been 246 opioid related illness calls, with 139 of those being priority one calls.

Kelley also shared numbers showing there have been 3,094 opioid related illness calls in Lowell since Jan. 1, 2013, with 1,621 of those classified as priority one.

Former City Councilor Corey Belanger, who chairs the Opioid Epidemic Task Force, expressed shock during the meeting over "Drug Dealer Relationships" statistics.

The numbers, compiled by members of various universities across the state -- including Wilson Palacios, of UMass Lowell -- show 92 percent of drug users trust their primary drug dealer to be honest about the quality and contents of what they are selling.

"A drug dealer is not your friend," Belanger said. "Unbelievable, isn't it?"

After Monday's meeting Belanger pointed out progress with the subcommittee's meetings that have been taking place since 2013.

"Lowell was down 22 percent in fatal overdoses last year, while the state average was 8 percent," Belanger said. "We have a tremendous buy-in. There's a lot of concerned people and a lot of agencies partner up, share resources and share data."

He attributes a portion of the success to the introduction of technology.

"We have data we go over monthly and see where we progress," Belanger said. "We're here to save lives and we're making significant improvements."

Anyone seeking assistance entering a detox or recovery program is asked to call the Lowell Community Opioid Outreach Program at 978-631-7240 or Lowell House Inc. at 978-459-8656.

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