



**Outbreak of Reported Synthetic Cannabinoid Overdoses and Confirmed Synthetic Cannabinoid Deaths in West Virginia**

**TO: West Virginia Healthcare Providers, Hospitals and other Healthcare Facilities**

**FROM: Rahul Gupta, MD, MPH, FACP, WVDHHR, Bureau for Public Health Commissioner and State Health Officer**

**DATE: 01-29-2016**

**LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY HEALTH PROVIDERS, HOSPITAL-BASED PHYSICIANS, INFECTION CONTROL PREVENTIONISTS, LABORATORY DIRECTORS, AND OTHER APPLICABLE PARTNERS

**OTHER RECIPIENTS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO ASSOCIATION MEMBERS, STAFF, ETC.

**Demographics:**

Between December 1, 2015 and January 29, 2016, the West Virginia Poison Center was consulted on 15 reported cases of synthetic cannabinoid overdoses in which the victim survived. During this same time period, the West Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner confirmed 6 synthetic cannabinoid deaths. Out of the 21 total cases, 13 (7 reported overdoses and 6 confirmed deaths) originated from Raleigh County. Other overdoses were reported from Berkeley, Greenbrier, Jackson, Kanawha, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Ohio Counties.

In calendar year 2015, 83 cases of synthetic cannabinoid overdoses originating in West Virginia were reported to the West Virginia Poison Center; 27 overdoses were from Raleigh County and 17 overdoses from Mingo County. The majority of victims were between 17 and 39 years of age (range 17 to 60 years).

**Patient Presentation:**

Unlike the synthetic cannabinoid cases reported prior to 2015, current cases of synthetic cannabinoid overdoses have presented with a pattern of initial agitation and hypertension followed by severe hypotension, bradycardia, and coma. Victims have been able to be weaned off of the ventilator approximately 24 hours after the exposure.

In the later stages of the overdose, symptoms are similar to that of opioid overdoses and may be mistaken for an opioid overdose. Naloxone will not reverse the effects of synthetic cannabinoids.

Synthetic cannabinoids cannot be detected with a urine drug screen or laboratory tests available at hospitals in West Virginia. A positive urine screen result for THC does NOT indicate the presence of synthetic cannabinoids. There are no testing facilities in West Virginia, however the West Virginia Office of Laboratory Services (304-558-3530) will assist in locating out of state laboratories that may conduct testing.

There is no specific antidote. Close attention to support of cardiovascular status is required.

**Reporting:**

Please report suspected cases of synthetic cannabinoid overdose to the West Virginia Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

This message was directly distributed by the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health to local health departments and professional associations. Receiving entities are responsible for further disseminating the information as appropriate to the target audience.

**Categories of Health Alert messages:**

**Health Alert:** Conveys the highest level of importance. Warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** Provides important information for a specific incident or situation. May not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation. Unlikely to require immediate action.