

MEMORANDUM

To: Hospital Emergency Departments, Urgent Care Clinicians, EMS Systems, Local Health Departments

From: Illinois Department of Public Health

Date: December 19, 2018

Re: Unusual cluster of severely symptomatic patients from presumed contaminated crack cocaine

In the past 24 hours, two hospitals in southern suburban Cook County have reported 8 patients with symptoms ranging from confusion to cardiorespiratory arrest after reportedly using crack cocaine. There has been one death to date. The presenting symptoms do not fit crack cocaine and are more consistent with an opioid exposure. The symptomatic surviving patients responded to naloxone in the field and/or hospital. Per reports to the Illinois Poison Center, the individuals needed 6 to 10 mg of naloxone to obtain an adequate response.

EMS providers and hospitals may see an increase in patients with a history of crack cocaine use in the next few days. If this outbreak grows in number or widens in scope, EMS systems and hospitals may need to stock additional naloxone for treatment of affected patients.

In the presenting cluster, the urine drug screen was negative for opiates in at least one instance. Synthetic opioids such as fentanyl are not detected by most standard urine drug screens and will give a negative result. If a patient has 1) a clinical picture consistent with an opioid overdose, 2) a clinical response to naloxone, and 3) negative opiate urine drug screen, then a synthetic opioid exposure should be strongly suspected.

Please report patients meeting the above criteria as “potential contaminated crack cocaine cases” to the Illinois Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 for tracking purposes and treatment recommendations.