



February 1, 2023

Dear Community Partner,

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) received a report of a cluster of drug overdoses in Northwest Georgia, specifically in Catoosa and Walker Counties, as well as Hamilton and Franklin Counties in Tennessee. We are aware of several fatal and non-fatal overdoses that are suspected to be associated with the cluster. Preliminary information indicates that the overdoses may have been caused by cocaine and/or amphetamines laced with a potent synthetic opioid such as fentanyl. DPH is continuing to investigate this situation; we do not have any additional details at this time and this information may change.

It is critical that persons who use drugs understand there is a risk of overdose when using stimulants or other drugs that may be mixed with fentanyl or other synthetic opioids.

DPH received reports that first responders may have experienced symptoms after being exposed to drugs when responding to these overdoses. The first responders were treated and recovered. Out of an abundance of caution, when entering an environment where drugs may be present:

- Wear adequate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Specific recommendations from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation include double gloving, gown, n95 mask, and goggles.
- Double bag the substance with a bio-hazard label on the outside and handle per agency protocol.

If you are seeing unusual overdose activity or suspect the presence of cocaine, crack cocaine, or amphetamines mixed with potent synthetic opioids in your area, please notify the DPH Drug Surveillance Unit at ga.opioidprogram@dph.ga.gov immediately. To report an overdose which requires clinical guidance and may be related to these drugs, call the Georgia Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222**.

Whenever possible, naloxone should be carried when working in an environment where an overdose incident may occur.

- Georgia has a standing order for prescription of naloxone for overdose prevention, which makes naloxone available at any pharmacy without a prescription. For details on the standing order, please see the document available here: <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/standing-order/download>.
- When administering naloxone, please note that multiple doses may be necessary.

DPH will continue to monitor this situation and provide updates as they are warranted. We ask that you continue to keep DPH informed of any relevant updates. For more information about overdose prevention and Georgia's response visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/stopopioidaddiction>.

Thank you for all that you do. Sincerely,

Amy Benson, MPA, ICPS
Opioid Prevention Manager