

July 8, 2019

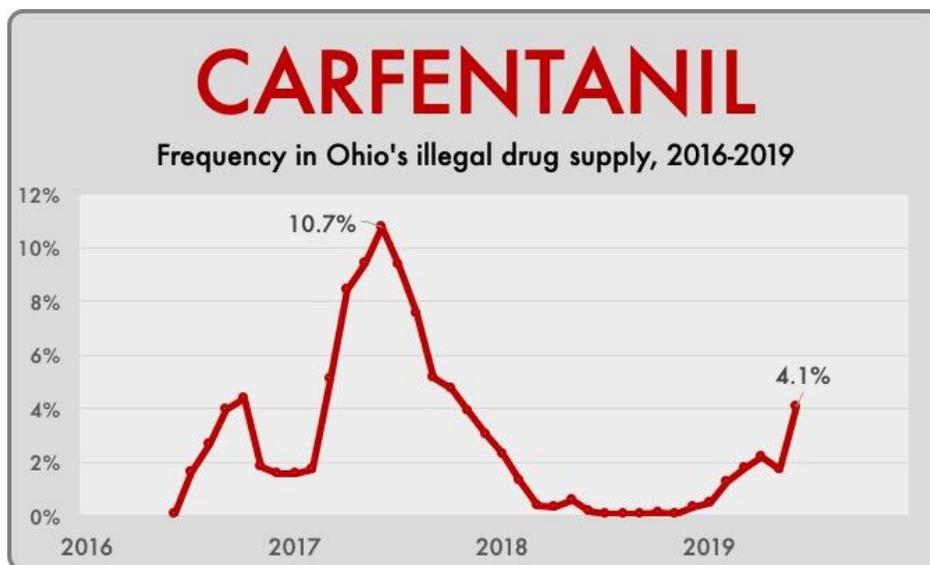
## NEWS ALERT- Immediate Release

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# Carfentanil Warning Issued for Northeast Ohio

## Danger greatest in Akron and Youngstown area



Source: Harm Reduction Ohio analysis of Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigations data

Harm Reduction Ohio issued an emergency alert today warning people who use drugs that overdose risk is extremely high in northeast Ohio. The cause is carfentanil, the most dangerous variant of fentanyl, which is being found increasingly in northeast Ohio's drug supply.

Harm Reduction Ohio (HRO), a drug policy organization dedicated to protecting the health and well-being of people who use drugs, regularly analyzes Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) crime lab data to identify changes in overdose risk in Ohio. The latest BCI crime lab data, received July 3, show that carfentanil has re-emerged in Ohio's drug supply and is likely the cause of recent overdose death surges. The drug is concentrated in 8 northeastern Ohio counties.

"Wherever carfentanil goes, death follows," said Harm Reduction Ohio President Dennis Cauchon. "People who use cocaine and meth need to be especially careful because when you lack opioid tolerance, even minuscule amounts of carfentanil can kill you."

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Carfentanil is the most powerful of fentanyl analog currently known. It was once used to tranquilize large animals, such as horses and elephants, but is no longer sold legally.

Carfentanil has been devastating to Ohio. More of the drug has been found here than in any other state. Carfentanil was the primary driver of increased overdose death in Ohio in 2016 and 2017. In 2018, for reasons unknown, carfentanil nearly vanished from Ohio's drug supply. Overdose deaths fell 22.6% to 3,758 in 2018, according to Ohio Department of Health mortality data.

“The return of carfentanil is scary, even though the amount is below the level of 2017,” Cauchon said. “Every illegal drug in Ohio, except marijuana, carries some level of carfentanil risk.”<sup>1</sup>

In 2016 and 2017, carfentanil was distributed fairly evenly across Ohio. That's not the case so far this year. In 2019, BCI data show that carfentanil has been concentrated in northeast Ohio, especially around Akron and Youngstown.

BCI crime labs analyze about 40% of drugs confiscated by law enforcement in Ohio. Through July 3, 206 submissions contained carfentanil. Six contiguous northeast Ohio counties -- Summit, Ashtabula, Portage, Trumbull, Medina and Mahoning – accounted for 62% of carfentanil. Summit County (Akron) accounted for more than 25% of carfentanil found in 2019.

Ohio has 88 counties. Outside of northern Ohio, carfentanil was found often (13 times) in one other county: Muskingum (Zanesville), located 100 miles south of Akron.

## **Strategies for Safer Drug Use**

Harm Reduction Ohio recommends following these strategies when using any drug other than marijuana:

- Never use alone.
- Start with a small test dose.
- Always have Narcan available to reverse an opioid overdose.
- Use fentanyl test strips, especially for cocaine, meth and pills.

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<sup>1</sup> Fentanyl-laced marijuana is a myth. No overdose death from “fentanyl-laced marijuana” has been confirmed.