



## Advisory 17-03 Carfentanil

To: All Providers and Agencies

From: Jeremy T. Cushman, MD, MS, EMT-P   
Regional Medical Director

Date: June 1, 2017

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The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has recently issued warnings both to the public and emergency responders nationwide about the health and safety risks of carfentanil. Carfentanil is a synthetic opioid that is 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times more potent than fentanyl, which itself is 100 times more potent than heroin. Carfentanil is literally used as an elephant tranquilizer and has no human medical use. Carfentanil and fentanyl are now being added to heroin batches and believed to be responsible for many overdose related deaths, especially when numerous deaths occur in a given area in a short period of time.

### *Why is carfentanil so dangerous?*

What makes carfentanil so concerning to responders is how lethal a small dose can be. Pure carfentanil in an amount as small as a grain of salt can be lethal to humans. Carfentanil is often found in powder form and can resemble heroin or cocaine, but can also be in other forms such as powder, blotter paper, tablets, and spray. The other major concern for first responders is how readily it can be accidentally inhaled, or absorbed through moist skin and mucous membranes. The DEA advises responders to exercise extreme caution on scenes to not disturb or handle any substance as this could lead to accidental exposure.

**Do not touch any potential drug materials or paraphernalia without appropriate PPE.** Carfentanil can be absorbed through moist skin or through the accidental inhalation of airborne powder. As with any patient care, approaching the patient with gloved hands will dramatically decrease ones exposure risk. Avoid coming into contact with needles, bags or other paraphernalia. Do not come into contact or disturb any powder that may be in the area unless wearing appropriate PPE which includes, at a minimum, gloves, eye protection, and respiratory protection. Further personal protective equipment recommendations may be found at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/fentanyl/risk.html>

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**web** www.mlrems.org  
**phone** (585) 463-2900  
**fax** (585) 473-3516

**office**  
44 Celebration Drive, Suite 2100  
Rochester, NY 14620

**mailing**  
601 Elmwood Avenue, Box 655  
Rochester, NY 14642