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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **COCAINE USE LOCALLY CONTRIBUTING TO FATAL FENTANYL OVERDOSES**

The Genesee and Orleans County Health Departments (GO Health) have identified a concerning trend of elevated cocaine use locally that is causing fatal fentanyl overdoses. Fortunately, these deaths are preventable, and resources are available locally to help.

Since 2021, there have been 29 fatal fentanyl overdoses confirmed in Genesee County, and at least 72% of these deaths have also involved cocaine.<sup>1</sup> In some instances, bystanders reported that the person who died of a fentanyl overdose thought they were taking only powder cocaine or crack cocaine. In Orleans County, there were 10 fatal fentanyl overdoses during this same time period, of which 40% involved cocaine.

GO Health has also identified through wastewater analysis that cocaine consumption is very high in Batavia and Le Roy compared to other areas nationally. GO Health regularly analyzes wastewater samples from wastewater treatment plants throughout Genesee and Orleans Counties for high-risk substances to better understand local patterns in drug consumption and these trends are compared to upwards of 160 sites nationally by the wastewater epidemiology company Biobot Analytics.<sup>2</sup> In August, the estimated cocaine consumption in Batavia was higher than 94% of other tested sites in the United States, and in Le Roy it was higher than 95% of other tested sites.<sup>2</sup> Substance use is estimated in each sewershed by taking the amount of the metabolite found in the wastewater and dividing by the size of the population served by the wastewater treatment plant.<sup>2</sup>

“For the last several years, Genesee County’s opioid overdose death rates have surpassed the state’s average, and been higher than neighboring counties too,” stated Paul Pettit, the Public Health Director for GO Health. “Unfortunately, what we are seeing here are indications of a relatively high amount of cocaine use locally, and when that cocaine is contaminated with fentanyl, it is causing preventable overdoses and deaths,” Pettit explained.

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that can be prescribed by physicians to treat patients’ severe pain that is not responsive to other medications, such as in cases of advanced-stage

cancer.<sup>3</sup> Because it is 50 times stronger than heroin, illegally-made fentanyl has largely replaced heroin and other opioids in the U.S. drug supply, and is commonly mixed with other drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>3</sup> Many people who use street drugs like cocaine or counterfeit pills are unaware that what they are taking may contain a lethal dose of fentanyl.<sup>3</sup>

Individuals who are aware of the risks of fentanyl overdose when using cocaine are empowered to make safer choices that could save their life or the life of a loved one, and a number of resources are available:

- Narcan (naloxone) nasal spray can be used to reverse an opioid overdose, and should be administered to anyone who is showing signs of having difficulty breathing or who is not breathing at all, regardless of whether the person is known to have taken an opioid. Narcan is available for free from the Genesee-Orleans-Wyoming Opioid Task Force simply by texting “KIT” to 1-877-535-2461.
- Fentanyl test strips, which can be used to check for fentanyl in drugs, are available for free from the MATTERS Network at [mattersnetwork.org/individual-request](https://mattersnetwork.org/individual-request).
- People who use cocaine or other drugs can reduce their risk by never using alone, taking turns when using drugs with others, or calling the Never Use Alone Hotline at 1-800-484-3731.
- Treatment for substance use disorders is available locally from Hope Haven at 585-922-9900, from Horizon Health Services at 585-815-0247, and from UConnectCare (formerly GCASA) at 585-343-1124 (Genesee County) or 585-589-0055 (Orleans County).
- Entry points to treatment are also available in person 24 hours a day at the City of Batavia Fire Department, the City of Batavia Police Department, the Genesee County Sheriff, and the Le Roy Police Department through the Public Safety Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (PAARI).

For information on Health Department programs and services, visit [GOHealthNY.org](https://GOHealthNY.org) or call your respective health department at:

- Genesee County Health Department: 585-344-2580 ext. 5555
- Orleans County Health Department: 585-589-3278

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## References

<sup>1</sup> Monroe County Office of the Medical Examiner. (2023, September 12). *Case referrals from Genesee in Years 2021, 2022, and 2023*.

<sup>2</sup> BioBot. (2023, September 20). *High risk substance report for Genesee and Orleans Counties, August 2023.*

<sup>3</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, September 6). *Fentanyl facts.*  
<https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html>