



THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner

nyc.gov/health

May 11, 2005

2005 NYC DOHMH Health Alert #16

Investigation of Possible Tainted Heroin

- **All suspected or confirmed cases of poisoning by contaminated heroin should be reported immediately to the Poison Control Center immediately at 212-764-7667 or 1-800-222-1222.**
- **All providers that have obtained suspect material are requested to submit the sample to the New York City Police Department for further testing by calling 911 or the local precinct.**

Please distribute to all clinical staff, including specialists in the Departments of Emergency Medicine, Clinical & Toxicology Laboratories, Clinical Pathology, Substance Abuse Clinics and Mental Health Clinics

May 11, 2005

Dear Colleagues:

On May 10, 2005, a male heroin user presented to a hospital in the Bronx complaining of diffuse, progressively worsening pain that began immediately after drug injection the night before; he described not experiencing his typical euphoria after injection. Over several hours in the hospital he also manifested a neurologic syndrome consisting of muscle spasms, fasciculations, hyperreflexia, and clonus. His symptoms and agitation worsened despite sedation and he eventually required intubation.

Possible explanations for this clinical syndrome include strychnine poisoning and tetanus.

If this case is the result of a batch of contaminated or adulterated heroin, other such cases may occur. Clinicians should be aware of this possibility and alert to unusual complications of drug use. For technical assistance in the management of such patients 24 hours a day contact the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) Poison Control Center at the numbers provided. To assist us in this investigation:

- **Report all patients with a similar clinical syndrome to the New York City DOHMH pursuant to Section 11.03 of the New York City Health Code by **calling the Poison Control Center at 212-764-7667 or 1-800-222-1222.****

- **Submit any suspect material found on patients to the New York City Police Department for further testing by calling 911 or the local precinct.**

As always, we appreciate our ongoing relationship with the medical and laboratory communities in New York City to help us monitor poisonings of public health importance.

Sincerely,

James Cone, MD, MPH

James Cone, MD, MPH
Director, Environmental and Occupational Disease Epidemiology
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
253 Broadway, Room 402, CN 34-C
New York, NY 10007
212-788-4290