

PA GROUNDHOGS



PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

COUNTY: PHILADELPHIA

DATE(S): JAN/FEB 2024

NATURE OF EVENT: CARFENTANIL DETECTED

ADVERSE EVENTS: NONE REPORTED

DETAILS

Two bags of retail level dope in Philadelphia tested positive for the potent synthetic opioid carfentanil.

Sample 1: On January 24, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health received a sample that was sent to the Center for Forensic Science, Research and Education (CFSRE) in Horsham, PA, for mass spectrometry analysis. Testing concluded the sample contained the following:

Fentanyl, para-Fluorofentanyl, Carfentanil, Xylazine, 4-ANPP

Sample 2: One month later, on February 26, PA Groundhogs (PAG)--Pennsylvania's new statewide drug checking organization--received a dope sample through one of its grassroots partner organizations. Mass Spec analysis conducted at CFSRE revealed the sample contained:

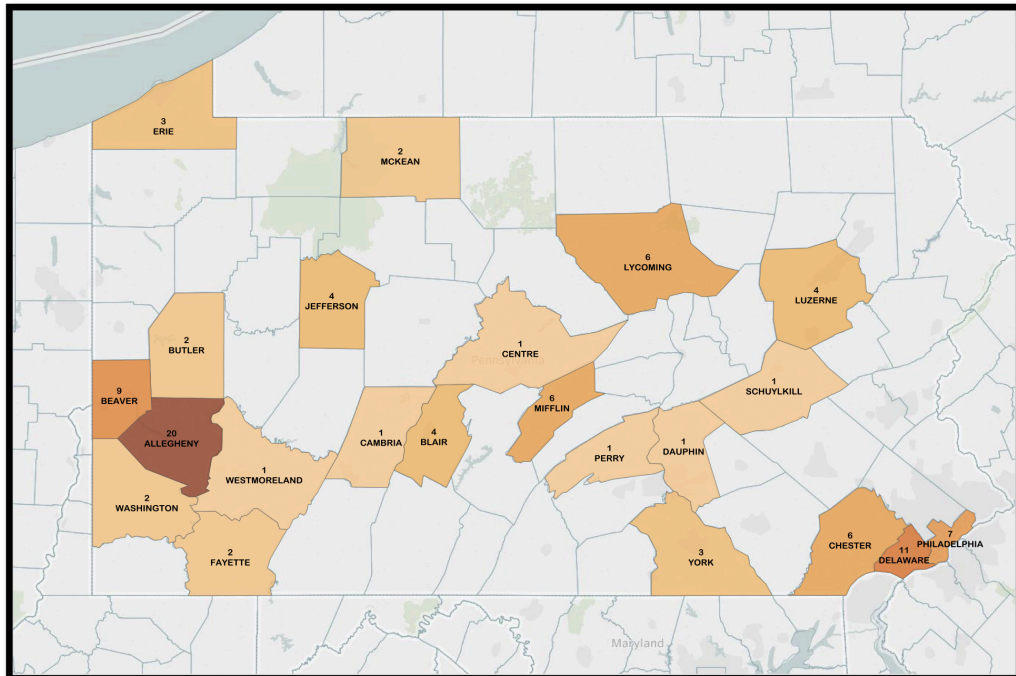
Fentanyl, Carfentanil, Xylazine, 4-ANPP

ANALYSIS

PA GROUNDHOGS' chemists determined that variations in the proportion of other compounds in the two dope samples make it unlikely they came from a single source using two different stamps (a common marketing technique in open-air drug markets). For the safety of our staff and volunteer collectors we are withholding the names of the stamps. It is believed the carfentanil originated in Mexico with precursors sourced from India.

Both the PDPH and PAG exhibits contained only trace amounts of carfentanil but the drug's reemergence in the illicit drug supply is cause for concern. Carfentanil is reportedly 100 times more potent than fentanyl and contributed to a massive surge in fatal overdoses in 2016 and 2017 with the majority of deaths concentrated in five US states—Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Michigan.

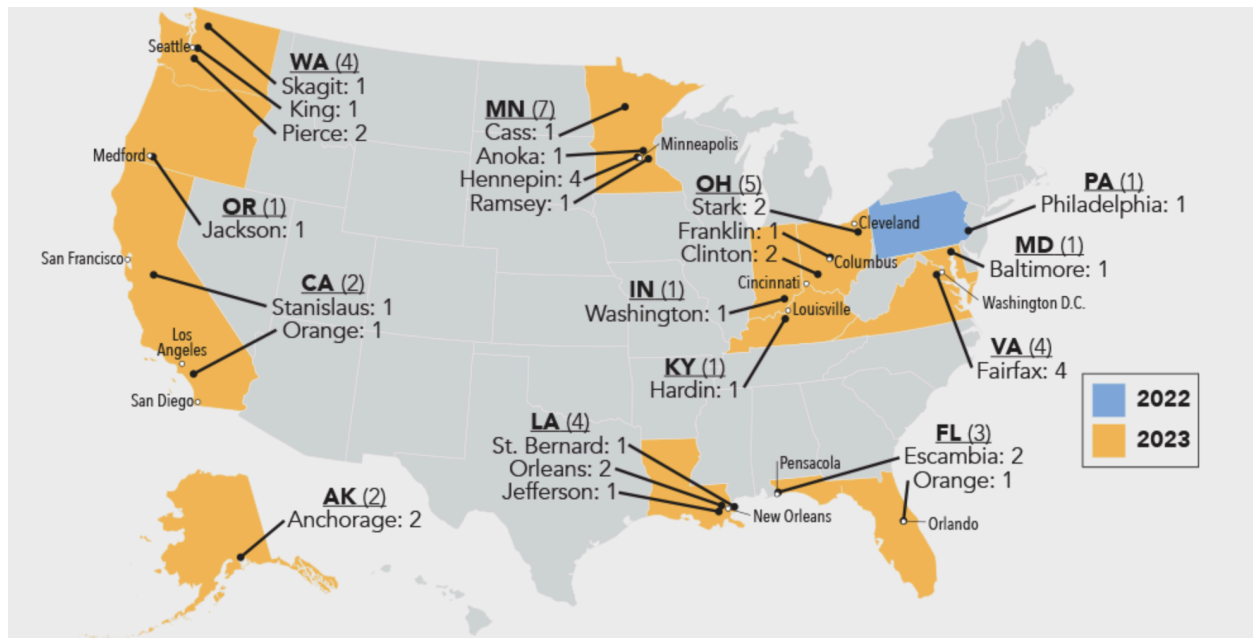
Carfentanil Deaths in Pennsylvania, 2016-2017



Source: National Forensic Lab Information System

Carfentanil was eliminated from the U.S. drug supply following China's ban on its production in 2017; and for the next five years fentanyl HCL synthesized in Mexico dominated the US illicit opioid market. The recent discoveries by PAG and PDPH in Philadelphia coincide with a multistate increase in carfentanil..

According to Millennium Health, a specialty laboratory that provides medication monitoring and drug testing services to clinicians in all 50 states and publishes reports based on its data, in 2022 carfentanil was detected only once in its UDS data (in Philadelphia). In 2023 that number had increased to 35 positive tests for carfentanil in a dozen states, with a concentration of states situated along established Mexican drug trafficking corridors.



Source: Millennium Health

In September, Ohio's Attorney General issued a press release warning of a resurgence of carfentanil after state law enforcement authorities seized three kilograms of the drug.

So far, in Pennsylvania carfentanil has only surfaced in Philadelphia. PA GROUNDHOGS will continue to monitor the situation and issue further alerts if necessary. If you suspect carfentanil is in your dope supply email kits@pagroundhogs.org to order a free test kit capable of holding three drug samples for mass spectrometry analysis at CFSRE. Results available within two weeks.

PA Groundhogs (PAG) is a collaborative effort between The Center for Forensic Science Research & Education (CFSRE); Penn State University's Consortium on Substance Use and Addiction; The Pennsylvania Harm Reduction Network (PAHRN); and Narcomedia.org. We offer free street-to-lab drug checking designed to mitigate public health threats from the influx of new and potentially dangerous synthetic drugs into Pennsylvania. We accomplish this through the distribution of immunoassay test strips for fentanyl, xylazine and benzodiazepines, as well as randomized testing of small amounts (10mg) of illicit substances at The Center for Forensic Science Research & Education, a DEA-certified lab based in Horsham, PA.