

## **RECENT TRENDS IN SUBSTANCE USE PATTERNS: THE RISE OF FENTANYL AND METHAMPHETAMINE CO-USE: September 30, 2020**

Dr. Nicholas Goeders, Executive Director

### **“SPEEDBALL” APPEARS TO HAVE RETURNED IN THE FORM OF METHAMPHETAMINE AND FENTANYL MIXTURES**

Although over 50% of Americans have reported illicit substance use in their lifetimes, the trends in specific drugs being used has changed substantially in recent years due to the emergence of novel psychoactive substances.

For instance, prescription opioids (like oxycodone) began to be replaced by heroin as the opioid users' drug of choice in 2013. However, the following year, the synthetic opioid fentanyl had flooded the market.

This shift to fentanyl use was also paralleled by a doubling of the incidence of opioid-related deaths from 2013 to 2017,<sup>1</sup> and indeed, over half of the reported deaths in 2017 were associated with use of synthetic opioids (such as fentanyl).<sup>2-4</sup>

Sadly, overdose deaths related to stimulants (including methamphetamine) have also increased dramatically during this timeframe, and approximately half of all stimulant-related deaths also involve opioids.<sup>5,6</sup>

Additionally, it has recently been reported that about half of all opioid-related deaths also involve stimulants.

Thus, it appears the United States has now fallen victim to an ever-growing polysubstance (stimulant + opioid) abuse epidemic.

We at the Louisiana Addiction Research Center have already previously described how the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the global supply of many drugs of abuse (including opioids and stimulants)<sup>7</sup> due to disruptions in international trade and/or shortages in synthesis precursors.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, it may be the case that these supply chain disruptions may be contributing to and/or exacerbating the already existing recent increase in the use and abuse of pure methamphetamine.

Additionally, it is also possible (perhaps even likely) that COVID-19 has promoted use of methamphetamine in combination with fentanyl, when you consider that there have been recent shortages in fentanyl precursors and the fact that methamphetamine has been shown to substitute for other abused opioids (such as heroin).<sup>9</sup>

### **NEEDED NOW**

- **Develop strategies to identify vulnerable and at-risk populations**
- **Determine how potency and efficacy of methamphetamine and fentanyl mixtures differ from either drug alone**
- **Determine ways to measure polysubstance abuse and how the adverse effects (including toxicity and lethality) for these drug mixtures may differ from each drug alone**

*Please direct all questions, comments and other responses to Dr. Nicholas Goeders, Head of Pharmacology, Toxicology & Neuroscience (LSU Health Shreveport) and Executive Director of the Louisiana Addiction Research Center:  
NGoede@lsuhsc.edu or 318-675-7850*

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