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December 4, 2023

The Honorable Public Safety Committee
City of Los Angeles
City Hall, Room 395
Attn: City Clerk

COUNCIL FILE NO.: 23-0353

Honorable Members:

On April 11, 2023, members of the Public Safety Committee passed a motion directing the Los Angeles Fire Department to:

“Report on existing protocols for identifying and responding to new street drugs, including information sharing with other City Departments and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.”

The Emergency Medical Services Bureau (EMS) reviewed the Public Safety Committee Report and determined there are no protocols for reliably identifying new street drugs. However, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) stays apprised of emerging drug trends from the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Joint Intelligence Reports (DEA), Joint Regional Intelligence Center (JRIC) reports and the Los Angeles County Health Alert Network (LAHAN). To provide the most effective medical care, the LAFD stays current regarding toxidromes (the constellations of signs and symptoms associated with classes of drugs), changes in personal protective equipment requirements, and advances in clinical treatment protocols.

The expansion of new or designer street drugs increasingly includes substances with a high potential for overdose. Xylazine, aka “tranq,” is a veterinary anesthetic that is being reported as an ingredient in an increasing number of street drug mixtures. When mixed with opiates, Tranq heightens and prolongs the depressant effect on the central nervous system, thus increasing the risk of overdose and death.

The identification of a new variation of street drug is challenging because of the inconsistent nature of illicit drug mixtures, quantities of each ingredient and the individual patient’s responses or tolerances to them. As such, the LAFD does not have an existing protocol or procedure for reliably identifying new street drugs. Identification of new street

drugs by symptoms alone is inconsistent and unreliable. Oftentimes, the symptoms manifested by patients such as apnea, seizures, or altered level of consciousness are generalized symptoms rather than drug specific. This makes distinguishing the effects of a single street drug very difficult to identify. To date, there are no publically available tests for new street drugs or their derivatives, thus paramedic treatment is tailored to toxidromic presentation. However, receiving hospitals can collect samples for analysis to make a definitive determination on active intoxicants and or metabolites.

LAFD paramedics are certified to practice in Los Angeles County and follow LA County Department of Health Service's Protocols Reference 1241(P) for treatment of overdose, poisoning or ingestion. This treatment is based upon a response to symptom presentation by the patient. The primary medication utilized in this treatment modality is Naloxone (Narcan), an opioid antagonist, which binds to opioid receptors and can reverse and block the effects of drugs such as fentanyl, heroin, and oxycodone. Other available treatments such as ventilation support, fluid replacement or cardiac medications are based upon the symptom presentation of the patient. Since Xylazine is not an opioid, Narcan is not effective against it. However, because Xylazine is commonly mixed with opioids for effect, Narcan is still recommended to reverse the opioid portion of the overdose.

The LAFD receives information regarding emerging drug trends from the DEA as Joint Intelligence Reports, County of Los Angeles Public Health LAHAN advisories and JRIC reports. LAHAN advisories are available and disseminated to all health care providers within LA County. The information the LAFD receives is evaluated by the EMS Bureau and formatted into a one page EMS Training Alert for dissemination to our field members through the information portal and EMS training unit to incorporate into their instructional material. When suspected new street drugs are encountered, notifications are made to LA County DHS, Poison Control, and our regional partners. When changes in treatment protocols are developed at the state, county, or local agency level, the information is disseminated through mandatory continuing education. In addition, the EMS Bureau has Tactical Emergency Medical Service (TEMS) paramedics that regularly train and respond with LAPD SWAT units allowing for real time sharing of information.

The Los Angeles Fire Department recognizes that the collection and dissemination of new street drugs is a cornerstone of providing effective emergency medical service. We will continue to collaborate with our partnering agencies to fulfill our Public Service Mission.

Sincerely,



KRISTIN M. CROWLEY
Fire Chief