



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Public Health

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July 20, 2015

To: All North Carolina Health Care Providers  
From: Megan Davies, M.D., Acting State Health Director  
Re: **Health Alert: Possible heroin mixed with clenbuterol**

The North Carolina Division of Public Health (NC DPH) is currently investigating 18 cases of illness potentially due to use of heroin mixed with clenbuterol. Reported cases are from four counties (Durham, Lee, Orange, and Wake). The source of the clenbuterol-contaminated heroin is suspected to be in Durham County.

NC DPH is distributing this alert in collaboration with the Carolinas Poison Center to provide information regarding this situation and guidance to North Carolina clinicians.

### Summary

NC DPH was notified on Wednesday, July 8, 2015, of two potential cases of illness due to use of heroin mixed with clenbuterol. Clenbuterol is a potent beta-agonist not approved for human use in the United States. To date, 18 potential cases have been identified, 17 resulting in hospitalization (1 had symptoms that warranted hospitalization but refused referral). Three cases have laboratory confirmation of clenbuterol after having used heroin. Several other cases have laboratory results pending.

Cases are similar to a mini-epidemic of clenbuterol-contaminated heroin in North Carolina in 2005. In the current outbreak, cases have reported symptoms atypical for heroin use, including a rapid onset of heart palpitations, dizziness, anxiety, vomiting, fainting, hypotension, shock, and severe muscle cramping.

### Recommended Actions

Providers should consider illness due to heroin mixed with clenbuterol in any patient who reports recent heroin use (any route) and presents with hypokalemia, tachycardia, palpitations, or elevated white blood cell count without other symptoms suggestive of withdrawal.

For potential cases, all healthcare providers and clinical office staff are encouraged to take the following steps:

- Test for clenbuterol by sending urine to NMS Labs and ordering test NMS 9306U (anabolic steroid screen).
- Call the Carolinas Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 to seek assistance with management.
- Notify your local health department.

[www.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.ncdhhs.gov) • [www.publichealth.nc.gov](http://www.publichealth.nc.gov)

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