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NEWS

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Boulevard Dallas, Texas 75235 (214)688-3404

CONTACT: Ann Williams
Office: 214/688-3404
Home: 214/375-6043

*****Abuse of Bazedrex inhalers can be fatal.

DALLAS--Thirteen deaths here have been attributed to misuse of a popular inhaler over the past six years.

Scientists at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas have reported that intravenous use ("shooting up") of propylhexedrine (Bazedrex) has been implicated not only in the accidental deaths of 13 young black adults but also in one suicide and two homicides. Nine patients who abused the drug and have serious heart and lung damage as a result have also been studied.

"This has become a regular phenomenon in Dallas with one to five deaths each year," says Dr. James Garriott, assistant professor of pathology and pharmacology. "But I think we have to take this with a grain of salt. In most places propylhexedrine is not something that is routinely analyzed for. The signs are frequently mistaken for those of heroin overdose, and narcoticism is listed as cause of death."

Propylhexedrine is routinely analyzed for at Parkland Memorial Hospital because abuse of Bazedrex has become a significant problem, says Dr. Ron Anderson, director of Parkland's emergency services and assistant dean of clinical affairs at UTHSCD. He is now following nine patients with heart and lung problems due to Bazedrex abuse.

Readily available as a nasal decongestant, the Bazedrex inhaler is relatively cheap and does not require a prescription. The active ingredient, propylhexedrine, stimulates the central nervous system, as amphetamines do.

first add Benzedrex

Abusers dissolve the drug from the cotton wick to get an injection. Over a period of time, possibly six to 12 months, propylhexedrine causes changes in the blood vessels of the lungs so that the arteries get clogged up, putting a strain on the heart. The amount of the drug that would be fatal to a person may depend on the amount of obstruction in the arteries.

A study of 12 deaths occurring between 1973 and 1978 in Dallas was published last July in The American Journal of Medicine by Anderson; Garriott; Dr. Vincent DiMaio, associate professor of pathology; and Dr. Homero R. Garza, a resident in internal medicine during the study.

Since 5 of these deaths occurred immediately after physical exertion and abusers have been found to have damage to the cardiopulmonary vascular system, the researchers recommend that physicians look for propylhexedrine intoxication in sudden, stress-induced collapse of young adults--especially where drug use is suspected.

All the sudden death victims were black and between the ages of 19 and 34. All but two were male.

Also included in the study were one suicide and two homicide victims with toxic levels of propylhexedrine in their blood. The suicide victim had just been jailed. Guards reported he was "hyperactive, excited and almost climbing the walls." About 45 minutes later, he was found hanging in his cell, possibly as a result of an acute drug-induced psychosis.

The nine patients now being followed are also black, ages 22 to 46. All but one are male. Researchers had suspected that Benzedrex abuse might be peculiar to a Dallas subculture. But since publishing their findings, they have learned of isolated cases in North Carolina and California.

Anderson, a pharmacist before he became a physician, urges pharmacists to keep Benzedrex inhalers behind the counter and monitor the sales. "That might keep some kid from trying it."

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