



To: All Washington State Emergency Departments

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Subject: Cyanide Poisoning Alert

The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) has notified the National Poison Database System (NPDS) of three Eastern US cases possibly associated with cyanide ingestion. They may have resulted from heroin contaminated with cyanide.

It is unusual to have 3 potential cases of cyanide poisoning in close proximity in a short period of time. These may be from coincidence, but it is important to not ignore the cases.

We recommend that any patient presenting with unexplained persistent metabolic acidosis due to elevated lactate, particularly if associated with hypotension, and altered mental status, be considered for possible cyanide poisoning. Cyanide levels are not readily available, so clinical diagnosis in a suspicious setting would be required. Measuring a venous pO_2 and finding it greater than 55 mm Hg would indicate poor oxygen utilization by the tissues and further support the possibility of cyanide poisoning and the clinical use of a cyanide antidote.

If you have questions about this topic or any suspected poisoning case in your area, please contact the Washington Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222. We have nurses, pharmacists, poison specialists, & a Medical Toxicologist available 24/7.