



# Palm Beach County Prevention Bulletin



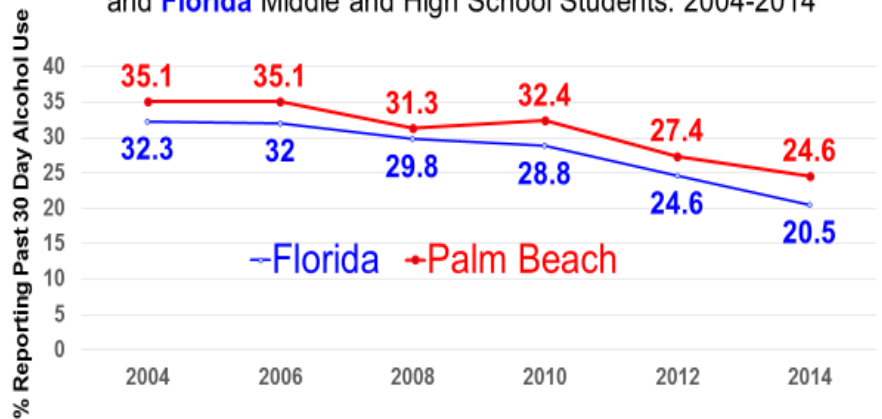
January 2016 Palm Beach County, Florida

## Declining Underage Drinking Rates on Track for “80 by 18”

Palm Beach County middle and high school students have reported declining rates of underage drinking between 2010 and 2014. That progress has contributed to the goal that by 2018, 80 percent of Palm Beach County students will not be considered current users of alcohol. Current alcohol use is defined as having consumed one or more drinks in the 30 days prior to taking the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS). The Survey is conducted annually statewide and oversampled in even numbered years to provide county-level results. The combined rate for middle and high school students declined from 32.4 percent in 2010 to 24.6 percent in 2014 or a drop of 7.8 percentage points across the four year period. If the rate continues to decline by 4.6 percentage points between 2014 and 2018, the Goal of 80 by ‘18 can be achieved.

Across all of Florida the rate of underage drinking among middle and high school students decreased from 28.8 percent in 2010 to 20.5 percent in 2014 or 8.3 percentage points. Preliminary findings from the 2015 FYSAS are projected to show a continuing decline of current alcohol use by one percentage point for all Florida middle and high school students down to 19.4 percent.

Current (past 30-day) any Alcohol Use among Palm Beach County and Florida Middle and High School Students: 2004-2014



Source: Florida Youth Substance Abuse Surveys 2004-2014

## Progress in Fight against “Flakka”

The Palm Beach County Substance Awareness Coalition conducted a July 30<sup>th</sup> Town Hall meeting hosted at the Hanley Center addressing the spread of the synthetic drug “flakka” which is linked to 17 deaths and 157 crime lab cases in Palm Beach County during 2015. The meeting concluded with suggestions from participants for a Flakka Community Action Plan. A priority identified was the need for an emergency medicine protocol in how to treat flakka users experiencing the acute “excited delirium” syndrome associated with the abuse of the powerful stimulant drug. A second need requested by those attending the Town Hall meeting was the development of guidelines for treatment professions on the special needs of clients who were dealing with the long term adverse effects of flakka abuse. Those effects include cognitive impairment hampering the ability to think, communicate, and read as well as extended periods of paranoia requiring individual therapeutic session rather than group counseling.

A special training for emergency medicine personnel and first responders was held January 18 at Palm Beach County Fire Rescue. A focus group of addiction treatment professionals was held on December 11<sup>th</sup> at the Mental (continued on page 2)

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## Fight Against Flakka

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Health Association of Southeast Florida. Most all of those attending had experience dealing with clients who had used flakka. The age of their clients ranged from 18 to 35 years. Providers addressed the need to modify their assessment as flakka patients were unable to complete paperwork in one session. The most often asked question was where can clients be sent for long-term treatment and ongoing support. Treatment providers reported they had modified their treatment plans to accommodate flakka clients by:

- Having shorter treatment sessions
- Individual rather than group treatment sessions.

The top priorities identified are the need for research into best practices for treatment options with flakka clients and funding for increased access to detox and long-term treatment. Another need is for continued training for service providers in how to treat flakka clients. These recommendations were passed on to the federal Addiction Technology Transfer Centers of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration along with a request for a national webinar on special treatment issues related to novel psychoactive substances such as flakka and other synthetic cathinones as well as synthetic cannabinoids.

In part due to the worldwide media reports of the flakka epidemic in South Florida, the Chinese government banned 116 synthetic drugs effective October 1, 2015 including *alpha*-PVP the drug sold as flakka. South Florida's epidemic

of flakka abuse was first identified in September 2014 in Broward County and then spread to neighboring Palm Beach County and other areas of Florida. Since that time there have been steadily increasing consequences of the powerful synthetic stimulant's abuse including deaths, excited delirium medical emergencies, hospital cases, addiction treatment admissions, and arrests. *Alpha*-PVP was banned in Florida and nationwide in the early months of 2014 but was not controlled in its source country, China from where it was sold online and shipped via world wide delivery services. The recent ban by China appears to be having an impact on the drug's availability locally. Two measures of the South Florida flakka epidemic have started to decline since that date.

Hospital emergency department cases related to flakka abuse have decreased from 11.61 per day in July 2015 (n=360) to 2 per day during December 1-27 (n=54) in the four Broward Health Medical Centers. Addiction treatment admissions for flakka at the Broward Addiction Recovery Center (BARC) escalated from 1 in September 2014 to 50 in the month of July 2015. The number of cases then declined to 39 in October, 34 in November, and 23 in December 2015. While far too soon to constitute a trend, these data reflect the first positive signs of flakka's decline.

However, it is highly likely that other synthetic cathinones sold using the "brand name" flakka could replace *alpha*-PVP. There have already been reports of TH-PVP appearing locally. Proposed legislation from the State Attorney General's Office for the Florida Legislature would provide a new method of banning synthetic drugs by their pharmaceutical action in the brain rather than their chemical molecular structure. This would make new substances illegal even before that appear.

### The 2016 Florida Designer Drugs Enforcement Act

This Act is a comprehensive legislative proposal to update and strengthen the mechanisms to control synthetic designer drugs in Florida. The proposed Act is a result of a year long study and incorporates the best practices of our sister states as well as the United Kingdom and other nations.

In addition to recommending the specific scheduling of certain novel psychoactive substances, the Act proposes a class system for designer drug groups currently of a threat in Florida including synthetic cannabinoids, substituted cathinones, substituted phenethylamines, N-Benzyl phenethylamines, substituted tryptamines, and substituted phenylcyclohexylamines. The Act would also strengthen Florida's analog law to incorporate a workable definition of "substantially similar" chemical structure.

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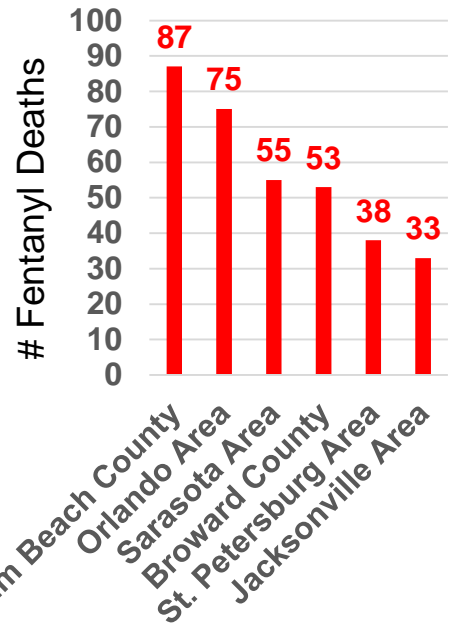
## Heroin and Fentanyl Deaths Escalating

Data from the Palm Beach County Medical Examiner Office indicate an 18-fold increase in heroin deaths between calendar year 2012 (n=6) and the total for the first 11 months of 2015 (n=106). These deaths parallel nearly a quadrupling of heroin deaths in all of Florida between 2012 (n=117) and 2014 (n=447). The Statewide totals for 2015 have not yet been released. Palm Beach County also had 87 Fentanyl and/or Fentanyl analog deaths in 2014, the highest number of any county in the State.

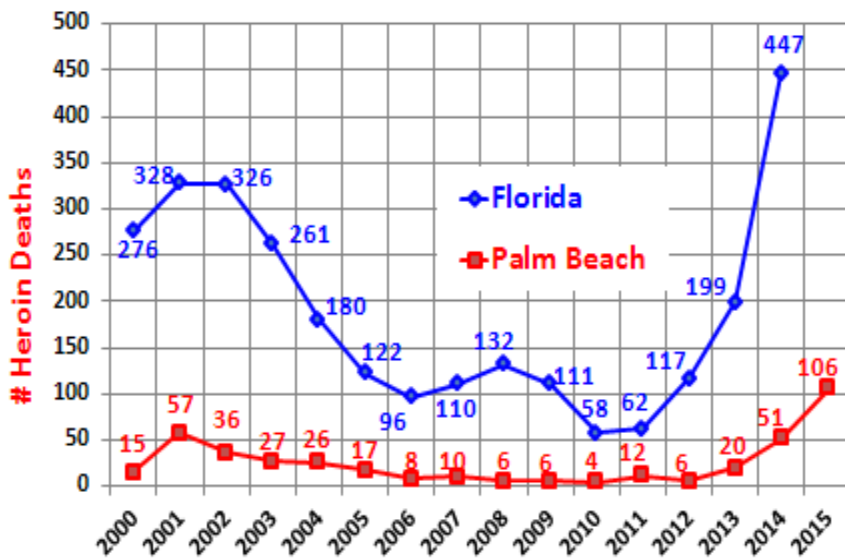
National studies reveal the rapid growth of new heroin users is occurring among young adults 18-25 years of age with most being addicted to a prescription opioid prior to initiation of heroin use. Despite the dangers associated with heroin, its use has increased to an estimated 435,000 current users in 2014 among the US population aged 12 and above.

Historically, Florida has had lower rates of heroin use and consequences than much of the rest of the nation and particularly from 2003 to 2010 when illegally diverted opioid pain medications were easily available through “doctor shopping” or numerous “pill mills.” Florida’s crackdown on the supply of diverted pharmaceuticals reduced the availability of and raised the street price of narcotic medications beginning in 2011. This occurred as Mexican heroin production dramatically increased and spread to the East Coast including Florida.

**Fentanyl Deaths In 2014 by Florida Medical Examiner Districts**



**Number of Heroin Deaths in Florida and Palm Beach County: 2000–2015**



A critical factor in the escalation of heroin deaths both nationally and in Florida is that the drug is now often laced with the powerful opioid, fentanyl, generally produced in clandestine labs from Mexico or China. Fentanyl was present in one-third of the heroin deaths in Palm Beach County during 2015. Fentanyl adulterants increasingly may be the only substance detected in alleged street heroin sales. Fentanyl is a Schedule II narcotic widely used as an analgesic and anesthetic and is the most potent opioid available for use in medical treatment. It’s euphoric effects are indistinguishable from morphine or heroin. Fentanyl and its various analogues from clandestine labs are up to 100 times more powerful than morphine and 30-50 times more potent than heroin.

**SOURCES: Florida Medical Examiners Commission Reports 2000-2014 and Palm Beach Medical Examiner Office January-November 2015**