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| BCHD PRESS RELEASE  Baltimore City Health Department  1001 E. Fayette Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21202  *Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Mayor*  *Leana Wen, M.D., Commissioner of Health* |

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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| **Health Commissioner Says State Report Reinforces Need For**  **Aggressive Response To Combat Overdose Deaths In Baltimore** |

BALTIMORE, MD (May 19, 2015) – A new report detailing drug and alcohol-related intoxication deaths in Maryland reinforces the need for Baltimore to take measures, many of which are newly underway, to aggressively prevent overdose deaths in the city.

The report, released today by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, shows a 23 percent increase in drug and alcohol overdose deaths in Baltimore City. There were 303 total intoxication-related deaths in Baltimore City in 2014, compared with 246 in 2013.

Last year, 192 overdose deaths were heroin-related, compared with 150 in 2013. The number of deaths related to alcohol use remained constant in 2014 at 86.

Baltimore City also experienced 71 deaths related to fentanyl in 2014, compared with 12 in 2013. Fentanyl is a rapid acting medication, often prescribed for patients dealing with acute pain that comes on suddenly and is not alleviated by other pain management. Fentanyl is extremely dangerous outside a hospital setting; it has even greater dangers than heroin.

“Preventing addiction to heroin and other dangerous substances is a top priority for my administration,” said Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. “This is why I convened my Heroin Treatment and Prevention Taskforce last year. Preventing overdoses and ensuring treatment for substance abuse are critical to the OneBaltimore effort. ”

“More people are dying from overdoses than from homicides in our city,” said Baltimore City Health Commissioner Dr. Leana Wen. “It’s a public health crisis to have people dying from a preventable illness.”

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Under Dr. Wen’s leadership, the Baltimore City Health Department has developed and is beginning to implement the Baltimore City Overdose Prevention and Response Plan. This was an early recommendation from Mayor’s Heroin Taskforce that was put into action in advance of the full recommendations given the urgency of the overdose situation.

Components of the plan include:

* Advocating for and ensuring passage of legislation to remove barriers for distribution of naloxone. Naloxone is a lifesaving drug that safely, effectively, and immediately reverses opioid overdoses.
* Implementing “hot-spotting” techniques to target high-risk populations including in jails, treatment centers and shooting alleys to save lives.
* Making trainings available for families, friends, and community members (full training schedule is available at <http://health.baltimorecity.gov/opioid-overdose/baltimore-city-overdose-prevention-and-response-information>).
* Organizing peer recovery networks and anti-stigma campaigns to encourage everyone to save lives.
* Continuing BCHD’s Staying Alive Program, which has taught more than 12,000 people about how to prevent drug overdoses and saved over 230 lives since 2004.

“In the wake of the civil unrest last month, we have additional impetus to address the root causes of poverty, crime, and health disparities,” Dr. Wen added. “We cannot afford to lose more lives to drug use. This report demonstrates the urgency of our overdose efforts. We cannot build a stronger, healthier OneBaltimore unless we tackle the underlying problem of substance use.”

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*Editor’s Note: Dr. Wen can be available for media interviews on this issue at 2 p.m. today. Please advise if you are interested.*