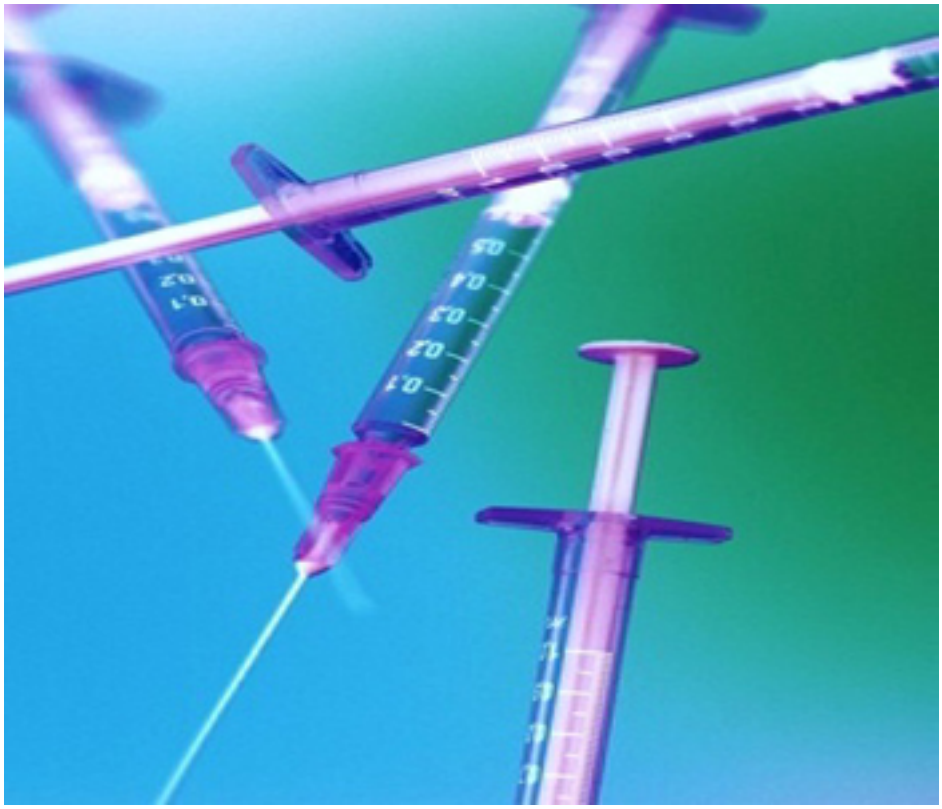

Heroin is making a come back

**BY** KUSH **AZRAEL**

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Heroin is back and is rapidly overtaking cocaine and crack as the drug of choice on the streets of Cleveland. There is so much heroin around that one report by Ohio health officials described it as “falling out of the sky.”

Not only is the City of Cleveland seeing an increase, but also the suburbs.

Heroin use is said to have reached epidemic levels in Cuyahoga County. In the past few years, there have been several major heroin busts in Cleveland. Even though law enforcement has seized large amounts of heroin in Cleveland, it was hardly enough to slow the supply to this area.

“Here’s what I think. We’re doing a fair job in reference to enforcement,” said Cuyahoga County Sheriff Bob Reid. “We’re trying to get the word out in county jail, pre-release centers, and prison about the dangers of heroin use.”

The sheriff’s department is also getting involved in more taskforces and has added deputies who will take on the narcotics problem. “We are throwing manpower at it and getting the word out. The health department is helping out as well.”

Heroin is not the only culprit. Other opiates like OxyContin, morphine and oxycodone are seen as gateway drugs to heroin abuse.

“What I believe has caused the rise in use is the number of people getting hooked on prescription drugs [that] are finding medications are more expensive than heroin,” said Reid.

A dose of heroin goes for $20 on the streets while one OxyContin pill will easily go for $75.

Those who abused OxyContin saw a change in the drug’s makeup. It now turns into a gummy substance when crushed preventing injection and snorting. Many users now simply turn to heroin to achieve a similar high. This is helping to balloon the demand for heroin.

Pain medications have an almost certain affect but heroin is unpredictable because dealers may choose to cut a high quality product to increase profits. Heroin can be injected, snorted, or smoked. The high has been described as a warm, euphoric feeling. Soon after one begins to use heroin, a physical need arises.

The user then has to continue abusing the drug to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

“The most affective treatment for heroin addiction is what we call methadone agonist therapy,” said David Pryor, a licensed clinical dependency counselor for Cleveland Treatment Center, Inc.

“We have been doing methadone treatment since the 70’s.”

People no longer see heroin users as some creepy older person sitting in dark hallways injecting the drug. It is more socially acceptable in the drug culture that is attracting younger people – even teenagers – who are prone to snorting the drug. However, middle-aged white males are still the most prevalent heroin addicts.

“There was a stereotype of a drug addict of [the] inner city, poor and African American.

The kind of profile we now have is a typical white male in his 40’s or 50’s,” said Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas Gilson.

Heroin is also taking a higher death toll than in the past. Although many of the new users are from the suburbs, most of the heroin is still found in inner city Cleveland.

Today, there are more young suburbanites dying as well.

Overdose among new users is common. Because of the inconsistency in the potency of the drug, they just don’t know how much they can take.

“We are also starting to see younger people, but still usually white male[s],” said Gilson.

However, according to Gilson, about 25 percent have been White women, and that's up from "about 10 percent a few years ago."

Cuyahoga County saw 91 people die of heroin overdose in 2010, an all time high according to a report released by the Ohio Department of Health. In 2011 there were a total of 107 deaths.

"We saw a pretty dramatic rise from 2007 to 2011. This year is on track to see another substantial rise, with an estimated 150 to 160 deaths based on half way through the year numbers," said Gilson.