

Cocaine Cutting Agent Can Cause Serious Blood Disease

To: Health Care Providers

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The Vermont Department of Health is advising health care providers statewide to be on the alert for agranulocytosis in users of illegal cocaine. The agranulocytosis presents with fever, mucous membrane ulcerations, and infections that may be life threatening. The condition appears to respond to usual treatments for agranulocytosis, including specific antibiotic therapy to combat infections.

The cause of the agranulocytosis appears to be levamisole, which has reportedly been added to as much of 30 percent of the cocaine manufactured for illegal sale in the US and Canada. Levamisole has been used in veterinary medicine in the de-worming of animals, and had been used in human medicine for treating autoimmune diseases and cancer. Due to severe adverse side effects, including agranulocytosis, it is no longer approved for human use.

Please report any case of unexplained agranulocytosis in a cocaine user to the Northern New England Poison Center at 800-222-1222 or directly to my office at (802) 651-1567.