

In one weekend, 5 drug overdoses in Juneau

• JPD: 'Strong batch' of China White heroin may be to blame • All five patients survived overdosing, CCFR chief said

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Juneau police suspect a strong batch of “China White” powder heroin may be to blame for a recent spike in drug overdoses this weekend.

Five people overdosed on drugs between Friday and Sunday, four on heroin and one on methamphetamine, Capital City Fire/Rescue Chief Richard Etheridge said. All five survived after receiving medical care.

Etheridge confirmed that two of the four heroin patients had used China White heroin, which Juneau Police Department Lt. Kris Sell said Juneau does not usually see.

“We usually see a tar heroin, which is a dark, kind of sticky, looks like what it’s described as — tar,” Sell said. “So it’s unusual for us to run into much powdered heroin.”

China White usually comes from Asia whereas black tar heroin usually comes from Mexico, Sell said. The difference between the two is in the level of processing — tar heroin is more crudely processed.

JPD has not made any arrests in connection to the China White heroin in Juneau.

“We would like to hear any information anyone’s willing to provide for us,” Sell said. “So far we don’t have any good tips, anything really solid. We’re still looking for information on that.”

Five overdoses in a single weekend is yet another indicator that the alarming heroin crisis in Alaska’s capital city is continuing to take its toll. Six people have died of a heroin overdose in Juneau since February of this year, mirroring a nationwide trend. The rate of heroin-related deaths has nearly quadrupled in the U.S. as heroin has emerged as the cheaper and easily available alternative to the overprescribed painkiller Oxycodone.

On Tuesday, Etheridge told the Empire the five overdose patients this weekend ranged in age from 24 to 38 years old. He said responding CCFR EMTs administered Narcan to three of the four heroin overdose patients. Narcan is a medication that instantly reverses the effects of a heroin overdose if delivered during the overdose.

Some in the community, including a local anti-heroin group called “Juneau — Stop Heroin, Start Talking,” are calling for Narcan to be in more hands in the community,

including with the families of addicts and with the police. JPD Chief Bryce Johnson previously told the Empire that JPD is considering having officers carry Narcan while on patrol.

A bill pending in the Legislature, meanwhile, would release doctors from civil liability for prescribing Narcan. The bill's sponsor, Sen. Johnny Ellis, D-Anchorage, said he hopes the bill will make Narcan more widely available in the state by making it available over the counter.