



Police believe more potent brand of heroin has hit local streets

By Molly Eadie

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RENSSELAER COUNTY >> Police responded to four heroin overdoses between last Thursday and Tuesday in the city of Troy. None were fatal, thanks to what some call a “miracle drug” naloxone, also known as Narcan, which can be used to reverse the effects. The victims were young adults using the heroin in public places, like restrooms and parking lots. Four overdoses in five days is not unusual -- Patrol Sergeant John “Jack” McMahon says the Troy Police Department has been receiving those calls daily. But at the scene of all these cases, police found envelopes of heroin with a brand name -- “Milk” -- stamped in red letters, and McMahon believes this brand is more potent than others. Heroin is often branded and marked with a logo, and McMahon said brands can arrive in the area and quickly disappear. He makes a point to check at the scene and see which brands are causing the overdoses. The sergeant says those who report the incidents often leave the scene before responders arrive. But there are legal protections for witnesses who report an overdose. Under New York State’s Good Samaritan Law, anyone who, in good faith, reports or seeks medical help for someone suffering from an overdose is protected against charges and prosecution of drugs crimes, up to and including class A 2 felony. The law also protects underage drinkers. The law is designed to eliminate barriers and encourage those witnessing an overdose to call for help without fear of arrest. The effectiveness of the law depends on public awareness and police cooperation. “Sometimes, with law enforcement, the word hasn’t filtered down to every officer, so sometimes people can be arrested, and even that’s a barrier,” said Keith Brown, executive director of Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services. “Even if they weren’t charged ... nobody wants to spend a night in jail.” One North Greenbush woman was arrested by East Greenbush police earlier this month after reporting an overdose to police. She was charged with seventh-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance and possession of a hypodermic instrument, both class A misdemeanors. The defendant has not yet been arraigned. Derrick Hogan, an attorney at Tully Rinckey, PLLC, said the defendant may be protected under the law. He said if officers are aware someone reported the overdose, that person should not be arrested. “Maybe there are other facts out there that police aren’t putting in the press release,” said Hogan. “But if that’s just it, that they were doing heroin, and he started to pass out and she thought he needed medical attention ... she did the right thing and called emergency services.” East Greenbush Police Chief Christopher Lavin said he wasn’t thoroughly familiar with the law, but would look into the case. “I would be interested to compare the facts of the case with the new law,” said Lavin. “We would certainly be looking to the DA’s office for legal guidance in that regard.” Rensselaer County Acting District Attorney Art Glass said he could not discuss the facts of the case, but attorneys would be “evaluating

the facts and circumstances to determine if they fall within the ambit of the Good Samaritan statute.”Troy Police Chief John Tedesco said two sergeants will be trained at the end of August to instruct other officers to use naloxone, and said Good Samaritan Law will be covered in the training.Regardless of the law, McMahon said, police are more concerned with safety than arrests when responding to an overdose,“To my knowledge -- and I show up at all of these, any overdoses -- we’ve never arrested anybody that has called that was using with somebody,” McMahon said. “Our priority is to save the person.”While patrol officers in Troy will soon be trained in the life-saving drug, the Troy Fire Department currently uses it and has already saved a number of lives.