

BLOOMFIELD TWP. — Officials here and in the Birmingham school district are alarmed about reports of students experimenting with the most deadly of illicit drugs — heroin.

Fears escalated after Oct. 29 when two former Birmingham Groves High School students were found dead within hours of each other. Both died of suspected heroin overdoses.

"This has never happened in our community before, never. We never had any inkling of the drug heroin being used around here before," said Shirley Bryant, the school district's director of communications.

Bryant has been with the district for 20 years.

"These deaths happened last Wednesday so we have been struggling with this for more than a week," she said. "When we heard what had happened, we had alerted people to make sure their kids are not going to an unsupervised party."

"Kids think they are invincible," Bryant said. "We are very frightened and

concerned about this."

School officials are concerned that two 20-year-old former students who died may have socialized with current students.

Investigators believe that four or more current students may have tried the drug with one or more of the men.

Marcus Forster, who lived at the Bloomfield Square Apartments, was found dead by his roommate the evening of Oct. 29.

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Police and medical examiner reports show he was found on a living room couch with a syringe in his right hand and heroin wrappers nearby.

The autopsy report shows there were puncture marks on his arm and his roommate said he had been "depressed over his recent arrest and his inability to kick his heroin habit."

Forster, a state wrestling champion who had won a scholarship to Central Michigan University, had dropped out of college and was working as an assistant manager at a local pizzeria.

He was last seen alive by a 17-year-old Seaholm High School student at about 10 a.m. The girl and Forster had made a date to attend a Narcotics Anonymous

meeting that night.

Earlier that day, Thomas Michael Hagan was found dead in bed at his home of a suspected drug overdose, although no drug paraphernalia was found nearby.

Hagan had a lengthy battle with drug abuse and had been kicked out of high school before his senior year, according to medical examiner reports. However, his family believed he had been drug free since December of 1996, the reports said.

His mother had seen him working on his car the night before his death and at 4 a.m. when he went to the bathroom. His 13-year-old sister found him in bed with the alarm clock ringing shortly after 7 a.m.

But Hagan did not wake up.

Dr. Ljubisa Dragovic, the Oakland County medical examiner, said drug test results on

Forster and Hagan had been sent to a lab and would likely not return until next week at the earliest.

However, in Forster's death, heroin was found nearby and a test done at the morgue showed the presence of "opiates" possibly heroin and cocaine in Hagan's system.

Hagan had been serving a retail fraud sentence and had been in several halfway houses before finally being released in August. Records show his family reported that a probation officer was screening Hagan twice a week for drugs.

He had spoken with his father just the day before and appeared to be stable.

Lawmen have called heroin among the most addictive of narcotics. A common saying about heroin is: "With heroin you can get a separation, but you can never get a divorce."

U.S. Drug Enforcement

Administration Special Agent Durell Hope said, "Once you start using heroin, it is very hard to leave it alone."

"Heroin is coming in from Southeast Asia and Mexico," Hope said. "But we are seeing an increase in heroin coming in from South America with a purity of 60 to 90 percent. It is being snorted at 60-80 percent purity. It is stronger today than ever before."

It's also cheaper.

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"Because of Colombians being involved, the price of heroin has come down," Hope said. "This puts the price near that of

cocaine and is exposing more youth to the drug."

Police say one hit of heroin can go as low as \$8 and range to \$25. It is marketed under hundreds of names, often from rap songs and labels. Common brands including Big Boy, Straight Up, Dynasty and Zombie.

It is commonly cut or diluted by adulterants that include mannitol, lactose, caffeine, procaine or other powders, some of which can cause adverse reactions for the drug user.

"The most important thing to remember is that there is no quality control in purchasing heroin," Hope said. "It could be 2 percent heroin or 90 percent.

You won't know what you are putting into your body until you do it."

The agent said he is not surprised to see the drug turn up in Birmingham.

"We have seen drugs in every community in metro Detroit," Hope said. "Drugs have no boundary. And, heroin has no legitimate medical purpose. It is very dangerous even under supervised medical uses."

Kathy Hungerford, a nurse at the Maplegrove Youth Treatment Center in West Bloomfield Township, said heroin use among teenagers has been on the rise for the last five years. She has seen heroin use in children as young as 13.

"It's become real glamorized," she said. "Kids pick that up real quick."

Although many teens will read about these recent deaths, Hungerford believes young people have a difficult time applying the lesson to themselves.

"It's one of those things about young people — they think they are invincible," Hungerford said.

Several students at Birmingham's two public high schools said Thursday they were unaware of any heroin use by students before this week.

"I think it's really shocking," said Stevie Riley, 17, a senior at Seaholm. "Of course, there's alcohol and pot. I've never heard of any heroin."

A half-dozen other students standing outside Seaholm after school agreed. One student laughed at the notion that heroin use is widespread there, asking a reporter if he'd like to buy some heroin.

Cassie Anderson, 15, a sophomore at Groves, said she's heard rumors of students there using drugs, but hasn't heard heroin mentioned.

"You hear some stuff, but it's not open — at least not among my friends," Anderson said.

But one parent said she wasn't surprised to hear about heroin use.

"It's sad that it's right in our own neighborhood and that we're not immune to something like this," said Mary Mellor a Bloomfield Township resident.

Mellor has a daughter who is a senior at Seaholm and her son graduated from there last year.

"I'm sure it's there and they're aware of it," she said. "They are just disciplined enough, thank God, that they won't have anything to do with it."

Bill Falls, 18, a senior at Seaholm, said he wrestled at meets against Forster's team.

"I heard rumors that he did drugs, but I didn't know he did heroin," Falls said.

Capt. James Anas of the Bloomfield Township Police Department said detectives are looking at similarities in the deaths of Forster and Hagan, but believe each death was accidental.

Forster, Marcus

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"Both had attended Groves High School and knew each other and its possible they had a singular source for their drugs," he said. "We are looking at these as accidental deaths possibly caused by an overdose of drugs."

Anas added that drug abuse again gives everyone something to mourn.

"This is a tragedy that two young men — one from what I hear was a a very good athlete and the other an intelligent young man — are no longer with us."