

NOTE: This is the landmark case and article that caused the "cheesequake" - an outpouring of concern and outrage among Hispanic parents in Dallas regarding the "cheese" heroin epidemic. Oscar's death resulted in a series of public meetings between school district officials, police, drug experts, parents and children. At this point, everyone thought Oscar was the second child to die from the drug. A closer look at medical examiner records later showed he was actually the 18th area teen to die.

## Droga casera cheese causaría sobredosis

10:55 AM CST on Tuesday, February 20, 2007

Por SERGIO CHAPA/Al Día

A 15-year-old Marsh Middle School student died Sunday from apparent overdose of "cheese" heroin.

The drug "cheese" is believed to be a mix of the over-the-counter medication Tylenol PM and heroin.

Olga Sanchez said her son Oscar Gutierrez left the house with a friend Saturday night to attend a party in Oak Cliff.

According to the grieving mother, her son returned to their Harvest Hill Road apartment in north Dallas around 1 a.m. Sunday where he went to bed next to his older brother Alberto, who woke up to find him dead at his side.

Medical authorities have not released the boy's cause of death, but a police report indicated that Gutierrez had "white foam" coming out of his nose and mouth.

Police are investigating the incident as an unexplained death, but Sgt. Eugene Reyes with the Dallas Police Department's Homicide Unit said are not ruling out that the boy may have died from an overdose of "cheese". Regardless of their suspicion, police the medical examiner's office will make a ruling.

Sanchez said her family believes the boy took a dose of "cheese".

The grieving mother said that unfortunately, it was not the first time her son Oscar had suffered an overdose from the drug.

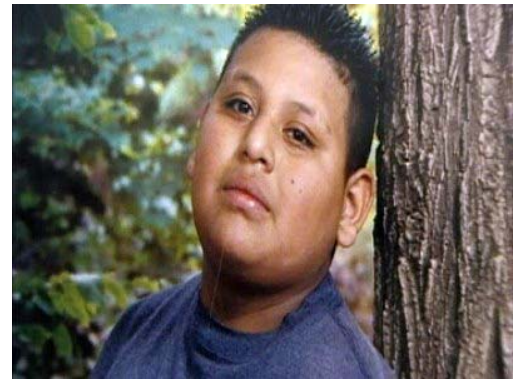
She said her son was hospitalized last September and October because of the same problem.

"I wanted to put him in rehab but he told me he wasn't an addict, that it was the first time he had ever tried it," Sanchez said of the first incident.

Sanchez, who came from Mexico City 13 years ago, said her son was very good and did not have any problems with anybody that is until he changed his friendships when the family moved to the Spanish Point Apartments off Harvest Hill Road eight months ago.

The mother said her son's new friends did drugs and showed Oscar how to use them.

Sanchez said after he son was hospitalized during the first overdose, she talked to him about the dangers of drugs but even then he decided to try them again.



“This should serve as an example for a lot of kids that do this so that they have more communication with their parents and also for parents to spend more time with their children,” she said.

The details of Gutierrez’s funeral services were not available Monday.

Apartment complex neighbor Carmina Herrera offered her support to Sanchez and said that she could not believe this happened to the grieving mother’s son.

According to Herrera, all the neighbors at the complex were sad for the death of Oscar.

“My daughter and him played here,” Herrera said. “Everything appeared to be normal. You never know what kids can get into and that can be fatal.”

A review of police reports revealed Oscar Gutierrez could be the second Dallas youth to lose his life to a “cheese” heroin overdose.

Karla Christina Becerra, an 18-year-old student, died from an overdose of the drug at her family’s home on Canada Drive in West Dallas in April 2006.

Sgt. Reyes said homicide detectives share information about overdose cases with detectives from the police department’s Narcotics Division so that they can look for who is dealing or providing the drug to the victim.

Police records show that 260 people were arrested for possession of heroin in 2006 while 37 have been arrested since Jan. 1.

Carlos Cruz, the founder of the Grand Prairie-based anti-drug and anti-gang group “Think About It”, said “cheese” was introduced to Dallas approximately a year ago by Hispanic gang members.

He reported the name “cheese” comes from the yellowish-color that results from mixing Tylenol PM with heroin.

Cruz said the popularity of “cheese” is attributed to its price. Unscrupulous Hispanic gangs are distributing the drug to Hispanic students, he said.

“There are a lot of reasons why this is popular among kids, but the number one reason is that many Hispanics are immigrants looking for a better life for their families...they work 10 to 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week and leave their children without supervision,” he said.

Cruz said anti-drug and anti-gang officers are trying to control the abuse of this drug but in his words, “The best way to fight it is for parents to talk to their children.”

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### **WHAT IS CHEESE?**

- It’s a deadly drug made from mixing black tar heroin and Tylenol PM.
- It’s a cream-colored and granulated powder that is inhaled usually by juveniles who carry it in packets of paper.
- One can buy it for as little as \$2.
- It produces euphoria, disorientation, lethargy, sleepiness and hunger.
- It is a highly addictive when one stops taking it produces a headache, hot and cold flashes, muscle spasms, anxiety, agitation, disorientation and disassociation.
- Until now, the highest consumption has been seen among Hispanic teens.

### **INFORM YOURSELF:**

- Wednesday at 4 p.m. with a meeting for parents at the Golden Corral restaurant at the corner of Forest Lane y Webb Chapel Road.
- Thursday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. with a presentation at the Jubilee Park Community Center at 917 Bank Street in Dallas.

If you find a substance that could be “cheese” in any Dallas school, report it at (214) 932-5627.