

street fentanyl



What is “street fentanyl”?

Street fentanyl is any fentanyl used by someone it was not prescribed for.

Fentanyl is a powerful pain medication. It is an opioid, like morphine, codeine, oxycodone (oxys) and methadone. Fentanyl is most often prescribed as a slow-release patch to people with long-term, severe pain.

Fentanyl is much stronger than most other opioids—up to 100 times stronger than morphine—and is very dangerous if misused. Even a small amount can cause an overdose and death.

Street fentanyl may be swallowed, smoked, snorted or injected.

Where does street fentanyl come from?

Street fentanyl can come from two sources:

- illegal drug labs
- patches that have been sold by or stolen from people they were prescribed to.

Most street fentanyl in Canada is produced illegally as a powder. It is sold as a powder or a pill, or is cut into (mixed with) drugs such as heroin or cocaine. This type of fentanyl is usually sold as another substance, so people swallow, snort or inject it without realizing.

Fentanyl is released from prescription patches by smoking or chewing.

What makes fentanyl so dangerous?

- It is often impossible to tell if a powder or pill contains fentanyl. You can't see it, smell it or taste it. Even your dealer might not know what he or she is selling, or how strong it is.
- Because fentanyl is so strong, the difference between a dose that will get you high and a dose that can kill you is very small.
- You can overdose even if you use a prescription patch with an identified dose. Everyone handles fentanyl differently. One person's dose can kill another person.
- If you are using other drugs at the same time—for example, other opioids, alcohol or sedatives such as Xanax, Valium or Ativan—the risk of overdose is even higher.

Why is selling your fentanyl patch risky?

If you sell fentanyl that is prescribed to you, you risk overdosing yourself. This may sound strange, but if you skip one or more doses, your tolerance is reduced (your body is no longer used to your full dose). The next time you take your prescribed dose, you can overdose.

Also, if someone dies after you give or sell them your fentanyl patch, you can be held criminally responsible for the death.

What does a fentanyl overdose look like?

When someone overdoses on fentanyl they first become sleepy, and it is hard to wake them. Their breathing becomes slow and shallow, they may snore, and they may pass out.

The person's body may become limp, their face pale or clammy, and their pulse weak or slow. For lighter-skinned people, the lips and finger tips may turn blue or purple. For darker-skinned people, the inside of the lips may become blue or purple.

I am with someone who has overdosed. What should I do?

Call 911 right away! The person needs specific drugs and medical care to reverse the overdose. No amount of coffee, cold showers or “walking them around” will help. If an overdose is not treated, the person can die or have brain damage.

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act protects you from being charged or convicted for drug possession if you call 911 to report an overdose, or if you are at the scene when emergency services arrive. This is true even if you are on probation for possession.

If you have a naloxone kit, use it. Naloxone can temporarily reduce the overdose and allow time for medical help to arrive.

If I use fentanyl or other drugs, what can I do to be safer?

- Avoid using in places where help is not within reach.
- Have a friend with you. Never use alone or in an unfamiliar place.
- Take turns in using, so the other person can get help if there is an overdose.
- Start with a small amount, so you can test the effects.
- Do not mix substances, including alcohol—it increases the risk of an overdose.
- *Call 911 right away* if you think someone might be overdosing.
- Keep a naloxone kit on hand. The Ontario government has a website that lists pharmacies where you can get a free naloxone kit, and training on how to use it: www.ontario.ca/page/where-get-free-naloxone-kit.

Where can I get more help with drugs?

ConnexOntario Drug and Alcohol Helpline:
1 800 565-8603

Access CAMH: Call 416 535-8501
and select option 2

MAARS (Metro Addiction Assessment Referral Service):
416 599-1448 (in Toronto)

You can get clean supplies in Toronto at
The Works, 227 Victoria Street.

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5355f / 08-2017 / P418