

Frequently Asked Questions About Fentanyl

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a drug that is 50-100 times more potent than other opioids (such as heroin, oxycodone and morphine). Doctors may prescribe fentanyl for severe pain and for some medical procedures. Because of the strength of this drug, the dose must be very carefully monitored by a health care provider to make sure that the person does not overdose.

Sometimes fentanyl is used illegally and not received from a licensed prescriber (such as a doctor or nurse practitioner), or is not used properly. This is when using the drug becomes very dangerous; it can slow down a person's breathing, lead to a coma and even cause death.



What does fentanyl look like?

Police have found illegal fentanyl in communities across Saskatchewan in the following forms:

- pills sold as fake oxycodone or other street drugs such as gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), ketamine or ecstasy;
- powder (sold as heroin or fentanyl);
- powder mixed into other drugs such as cocaine and crystal meth; and
- fentanyl patches used for purposes other than they were prescribed.

Some slang terms for fentanyl include: fake oxy, greenies, green beans, beans, green apples, apples, eighties and shady eighties.

What are the risks of misusing fentanyl?

When fentanyl is illegally made, sold and improperly used, its use is very risky because:

- Drug dealers sometimes sell this drug by telling the buyer that it is oxycodone when it is actually fentanyl or other substances.
- There could be other toxic chemicals combined with fentanyl. There is no way of knowing the strength or toxicity of the drug.
- Some people use prescribed fentanyl incorrectly. This could lead to an overdose which could result in death.

What are the signs and symptoms of a fentanyl overdose?

An overdose means that the amount of drug a person has taken is more than the body can handle. The body then has trouble working properly. When a person overdoses they may feel or seem sleepy. They may also have:

- “pinpoint” pupils;
- trouble walking or talking;
- bluish coloured and/or cold and clammy skin;
- a slow heartbeat;
- trouble breathing or slow, shallow breathing (10 – 12 breaths/minute) or snoring;
- seizures; and
- severe sleepiness, stupor or coma.

What should I do if I see someone who may have mistakenly taken drugs containing fentanyl or who has taken too much of the drug?

Don't delay. Call 911 right away if the person becomes unconscious, stops breathing, has chest pains, or has a seizure.

If it is safe to do so, remove any fentanyl pills in the person's mouth or patches on the person's skin so that the drug does not continue to be absorbed into their body. If possible, stay with the person until medical help arrives.

What advice do you have for people who are taking (or thinking about taking) illegal fentanyl?

Using fentanyl that is not prescribed for you or selling or buying fentanyl from someone that is not a licensed prescriber is both illegal and unsafe.

Illegal and improper use of this drug can cause death. The best way to stay safe is to not use illegal drugs at all. While we advise against illegal use, people who do use drugs should be sure to:

- not use alone;
- start with a small amount;
- know that mixing drugs and/or alcohol could lead to an overdose; and
- use where help can be reached right away.

Be careful when handling fentanyl, as it can be absorbed into the skin. Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth, because even a small amount can cause serious health problems, or death.

Fentanyl can be a deadly drug especially if used illegally and/or improperly.

Can I test my drugs for fentanyl?

There are no tests available to the general public that can check for fentanyl.

Is this drug safe if it is prescribed by a doctor?

Yes, fentanyl is safe if it is prescribed and used correctly. This drug should be taken only if prescribed by a licensed prescriber (such as a doctor or nurse practitioner) and used as instructed. However, a person must be careful if using other drugs at the same time, such as alcohol, benzodiazepines, illegal drugs or over-the-counter drugs.

When fentanyl is combined with other drugs/alcohol, there could be side effects which could make using the drug unsafe. To keep others safe, make sure that all drugs are kept out of reach of children and pets.

Illegal fentanyl users can be in danger of dying even with their first use of the drug.

Why are you giving this information now?

Fentanyl can be very toxic and there has been a rise in the number of fentanyl-related deaths in Saskatchewan and Canada. This means that there may be more of this drug in our province, which can increase the danger, especially to people who use illegal drugs.

Who can I contact if I need help regarding drug use?

Publicly funded Take Home Naloxone kits are available to eligible Saskatchewan residents at no cost. Naloxone is a drug used to rapidly reverse the effects of opioid overdose (including fentanyl) and to restore breathing, usually in two to five minutes. It is the standard treatment for an opioid overdose. Anyone can receive the training. For more information about the publicly funded Take Home Naloxone kits please contact your Addictions/Mental Health Services office.

To locate Addictions/Mental Health Services near you:

- Visit www.saskatchewan.ca/addictions.
- Visit HealthLine Online at healthlineonline.ca.
- Call HealthLine at 811. Specially trained staff are available to provide mental health and addictions crisis support, in a safe and confidential manner.



Who can I contact if I suspect someone is selling fentanyl?

To report illicit activity associated with fentanyl use you may contact Saskatchewan Crime Stoppers.

Saskatchewan Crime Stoppers is 100% anonymous and does not subscribe to call display nor are your calls traced or recorded. Web and Text Tips are encrypted. Call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477), text TIP206 and your message to CRIMES (274637), or you can submit a tip online at www.saskcrimestoppers.com where you can also view other unsolved crimes.



Photo provided by the Regina Integrated Drug Enforcement Street Team.

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