

What is FENTANYL?

Fentanyl is an extremely dangerous substance, and has been responsible for many fatal overdoses in the past several years. Read on to learn more about it and help protect your loved one.

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid. Medically, it is used to treat severe pain or to manage pain after surgery, and is sometimes used to treat patients with chronic pain who are physically tolerant to other opioids.^[1]

Prescription fentanyl is available under such names as Actiq®, Duragesic®, and Sublimaze® in the form of tablets, an injectable liquid, lozenges and patches.

When it is intentionally misused, fentanyl often shows up as a powder, spiked on blotter paper or is mixed with or substituted for heroin and other street drugs.

Fentanyl carries a high risk of overdose and fatality. To put it in perspective, it's 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. According to the CDC, overdoses involving synthetic opioids increased by 72.2% from 2014 to 2015.

Why is it so dangerous?

In high enough doses, opioids can cause breathing to stop completely. Fentanyl's strength increases this risk of overdose substantially. Synthetic opioids sold illicitly can be mixed with heroin or cocaine, which amplifies its potency and potential danger. This is particularly dangerous if an individual who uses illegal substances like heroin or intentionally misuses prescription drugs is unaware that fentanyl could be in it.

Overdoses of these drugs may require higher doses of [naloxone](#) to successfully reverse the overdose.^[1]

How can I protect my loved one?

If you know or suspect that your loved one is using or may be at risk of using fentanyl, it is very important to help them [reduce the risks](#) associated with use. Some strategies include:

- Carrying naloxone at all times in case of an accidental overdose. Higher quantities of naloxone may be necessary to reverse fentanyl-related overdoses.
- Testing any illicit substances before use with [fentanyl test strips](#).
- Using clean and sterile needles to reduce the transmission of diseases like HIV.

Help educate your loved one on the risks of fentanyl and make sure they know these harm reduction strategies.

If your loved one is struggling with opioid use, the resources below may be helpful. You can click [here](#) to connect with our support services.