

# Fact Sheet

## FENTANYL

### What Is Fentanyl?



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Fentanyl is a highly addictive synthetic opioid derivative that is chemically similar to morphine but 50 to 100 times more potent. It is approved by the Food and Drug Administration to be used as an anesthetic and an analgesic (pain relief) but is commonly made and used illegally.

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Synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, are the most common drugs contributing to overdose fatalities in the United States. Under the United States Controlled Substances Act of 1970, fentanyl is classified as a schedule II narcotic.

### “One Pill Can Kill” Public Awareness Campaign

- The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has issued a public safety alert to educate Americans on the dangers of counterfeit pills and urges the public to only take medications prescribed by a medical professional and dispensed by a licensed pharmacist.
- This public safety alert warns of the alarming increase in the lethality and availability of fake prescription pills containing fentanyl and methamphetamine.

### Rainbow Fentanyl Warning

- Since August 2022, DEA and law enforcement partners have seized brightly-colored fentanyl and fentanyl pills in 26 states.
- Dubbed “rainbow fentanyl” in the media, this trend appears to be a new method used by drug cartels to sell highly addictive and potentially deadly fentanyl made to look like candy to children and young people.
- Brightly-colored fentanyl has been seized in multiple forms including pills, powder, and blocks that resemble sidewalk chalk.
- Every color, shape, and size of fentanyl should be considered extremely dangerous.

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### *Fentanyl Dosage Forms*

- Fentanyl is pharmaceutically available as oral transmucosal lozenges (fentanyl “lollipops”), effervescent buccal tablets, sublingual tablets, sublingual sprays, nasal sprays, eye droppers, transdermal tablets, and injectable formulations.
- Non-pharmaceutical illicitly produced fentanyl is commonly encountered as counterfeit tablets or a powder distributed alone or in combination with other drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and MDMA.
- In many cases, people take these drugs without knowing that they are contaminated with fentanyl.

### *Fentanyl Neurological Effects and Addiction*

- Like other opioid drugs, Fentanyl binds to the brain's opioid receptors in areas that control pain and emotions.
- Repeat use of the drug diminishes the receptors’ sensitivity, meaning that it becomes difficult to feel pleasure in the drug’s absence
- This may lead to fentanyl dependence and eventual addiction that is characterized by compulsive drug-seeking despite physical, psychological, and social consequences

### *Side Effects of Fentanyl Use Include:*

- Slowed heartbeat
- Confusion
- Trouble concentrating
- Low blood pressure
- Nightmares
- Tightness in the throat
- Stiff or rigid muscles
- Constricted pupils
- Physical weakness
- Itching
- Coughing up blood
- Depressed breathing, shallow breaths, or irregular breaths
- Sweating
- Constipation
- Dry mouth
- Nausea
- Kidney damage
- Abnormal heart rhythm
- Eczema and other skin disorders
- Reduced urine output
- Bloating or swelling of the face and extremities

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### *Fentanyl Withdrawal*

People who suffer from fentanyl addiction commonly face the following withdrawal symptoms upon stopping the drug:

- Sleeping problems
- Diarrhea and vomiting
- Severe cravings
- Involuntary leg movements
- Muscles and bone pain
- Cold flashes with goosebumps
- Restlessness
- Stomach cramps
- Anorexia
- Hypertension
- Increased respiratory rate
- Anxiety, irritability or mood swings

### *Signs of Fentanyl Overdose*

- According to the CDC, signs of fentanyl overdose include:
- Small, constricted “pinpoint” pupils
- Falling asleep or losing consciousness
- Slow, weak, or no breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds
- Limp body
- Cold and/or clammy skin
- Discolored skin (especially on the lips or nails)

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### *Fentanyl Overdose Treatment*

What to do if you suspect someone is overdosing on fentanyl, as per the CDC:

- Call 911 immediately. Most states have laws that protect a person who is overdosing or calling for help from legal trouble
- Administer naloxone, if available. Naloxone reverses the effects of opioid overdose and is available from most pharmacies across all 50 states without a prescription
- Try to keep the person awake and breathing
- Lay the person on their side to prevent choking
- Stay with the person until emergency assistance arrives

### *Prevention: What Can We Do?*

The CDC advocates:

- Expansion of the distribution and use of naloxone and overdose prevention education
- Expansion of awareness about access to and availability of treatment for substance use disorders
- Early intervention for individuals at highest risk for overdose
- An improvement of the detection of overdose outbreaks to facilitate a more effective response

### *Toolkit*

**SAMHSA's National Helpline:** free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

**Maryland Office of Treatment Services:** an integrated system of behavioral health treatment and services that are available and accessible to individuals experiencing substance-related disorders. Includes clinical services, outpatient mental health centers, individual practitioners, group practice, partial hospitalization programs, and more.

<https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/Treatment-and-Recovery-Services-Unit.aspx>

**Narcotics Anonymous and the SMART:** program offers support groups and programs for those with substance use disorders and their families.

<https://www.na.org/meetingsearch/> <https://www.smartrecovery.org>



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### Resources and Research

- <https://www.fentanylawarenessday.org/>
- [https://www.dea.gov/fentanylawareness#:~:text=National%20Fentanyl%20Awareness%20Day%20\(May,to%20drive%20the%20overdose%20epidemic.](https://www.dea.gov/fentanylawareness#:~:text=National%20Fentanyl%20Awareness%20Day%20(May,to%20drive%20the%20overdose%20epidemic.)
- [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2021/20211117.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/20211117.htm)
- <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/>
- <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/withdrawal-timelines-treatments/fentanyl>
- <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/fentanyl>
- [https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Fentanyl-2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Fentanyl-2020_0.pdf)
- <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/fentanyl-treatment>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/fentanyl.html>
- <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/Treatment-and-Recovery-Services-Unit.aspx>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

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