



# Dangers of Fentanyl and Other Synthetic Opioids

**Synthetic opioids are opiate-like substances with similar drug effects. These drugs' potency and effects can vary and result in extreme risks. Using testing strips can reduce risks by determining the presence of synthetic opioids.**

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Synthetic opioids are available through prescriptions and illegally manufactured, including heroin, fentanyl, hydromorphone, methadone, buprenorphine, and others. Fentanyl is a potent opiate-like substance approved for medical use<sup>1</sup>. Fentanyl assists those who have developed tolerance and when they are not effective in reducing pain using natural opiates, including morphine, codeine, and thebaine. Fentanyl dosage and use frequency differ, often considerably lower than other opiates.

Fentanyl can be 80-200 times stronger than morphine. At times, fentanyl is added to illicit drugs, especially other opioids, to increase its potency. Since fentanyl is not readily identifiable by smell, taste, or look, illicit drug users may not realize that their opioids can be heavily contaminated. When users consume heroin, they may overdose, not realizing that additives may have changed the dosage and use frequency required. Fentanyl can result in an intense, short-term high resulting in temporary feelings of euphoria, with slowed respiration and reduced blood pressure. The drug may result in nausea, fainting, seizures, and even death.

To reduce the risks of overdose, identifying adulterated materials can be lifesaving. Fentanyl testing strips are available as a harm reduction approach to test the presence or absence of fentanyl and many fentanyl analogs in the unregulated drug supply<sup>2</sup>. Strips are an affordable, easy-to-use method of helping prevent drug overdoses and reduce harm. The small strips of paper can detect the presence of fentanyl in all different kinds of drugs and other drug forms, including pills, powders, and injectables.

To address the complex issues surrounding opioids, communities, health professionals, and policymakers must not simply undertake a regulatory solution but a holistic approach to tackling the problem by addressing the needs, including the safety of opioid users. Furthermore, health professionals and policymakers need to address the needs of those addicted and using illicit opioids.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/synthetic/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://harmreduction.org/issues/fentanyl/>



Contact your primary care physician for help. Your physician can help you navigate through the dangers of fentanyl. Be upfront about your use of legal and illegal opioids. Inform your physician regarding your needs.

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