



Fentanyl Facts for Families

What is fentanyl and how does it work in the body?

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid, similar to morphine but 50 to 100 times more potent. In its prescription form it is prescribed for pain, but fentanyl is also made illegally and distributed as a street drug. Illegal fentanyl is sold as a powder or made into pills that look like real prescription opioids (pain relievers).

Fentanyl works by binding to the body's opioid receptors, which are found in areas of the brain that control pain and emotions. Its effects include euphoria, drowsiness, nausea, confusion, constipation, sedation, tolerance, addiction, respiratory depression and arrest, unconsciousness, coma, and death.

Why is fentanyl a problem in San Diego?

Fentanyl is the most common substance found in opioid overdose deaths in San Diego – teens as young as 14 years old have overdosed and died.

Illegal fentanyl is being mixed with other drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine. This is especially dangerous because people are often unaware that fentanyl has been added. The high potency of fentanyl greatly increases risk of overdose, especially if a person who uses drugs is unaware that a powder or pill contains it. Naloxone is a medicine that can be given to a person to reverse a fentanyl overdose. Multiple naloxone doses might be necessary because of fentanyl's potency.

What Can You Do?

Talk | It's never too early to have a conversation about alcohol and other drugs. The sooner you talk about the dangers of underage drinking and substance use, the greater chance you have of influencing your child's decisions about using them.

Get Specific About Fentanyl | When you talk to youth, don't leave out the details. Be specific about the drug fentanyl and the dangers of its use. Let youth know that it is being sold as counterfeit OxyContin®, Xanax®, and other prescription drugs. Knowing one of these pills could be deadly, a child may consider the consequences of trying one of these too risky. Visit sdpdarf.org to help get this conversation started.

Monitor | Because substances, including counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl, are being bought and sold through texting and social media sites be sure to monitor where youth go online and ask about who they follow and what they are seeing and hearing online. Before allowing youth to go online and set up an account consider having them sign a social media safety contract with you.

Find a social media contract at sdpdarf.org.

Take Action | Naloxone is medicine that can reverse an overdose. Naloxone can be purchased at pharmacies in San Diego without a prescription or free from a local substance use prevention coalition. It is easy to administer and can be lifesaving. To find naloxone near you visit sdpdarf.org. Always call 911 if there is an overdose.

Treatment works and there is hope. Medication along with behavioral therapies have been shown to be effective in treating those with an addiction to fentanyl and other opioids.

If you're concerned about someone's opioid or fentanyl use call the **San Diego County's Access and Crisis line (888) 724-7240** for information about treatment and counseling options.

