



Fentanyl Facts for Medical Practitioners

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).

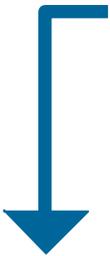
Fentanyl works by binding to the body's opioid receptors, which are found in areas of the brain that control pain and emotions. Its effects include euphoria, drowsiness, nausea, confusion, constipation, sedation, tolerance, addiction, respiratory depression and arrest, unconsciousness, coma, and death.



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 | Discuss with patients and parents the health risks associated with substance use. Let parents know there are counterfeit pills available to youth that are laced with the deadly drug fentanyl. Remind patients to never take a pill that has not been specifically prescribed to them.

Screen | The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) updated its clinical report on the importance of screening youth for substances. This report provides a simplified adolescent SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment) clinical approach that, in combination with the accompanying updated policy statement, guides pediatricians in implementing substance use prevention, detection, assessment, and intervention practices across the varied clinical settings in which adolescents receive health care.

Treat Opioid Use Disorder in Adolescent Patients | Medication along with behavioral therapies have been shown to be effective in treating those with an addiction to fentanyl and other opioids. The American Academy of Pediatrics advocates for increasing resources to improve access to medication assisted treatment of opioid addicted adolescents and young adults. In addition, AAP recommends that pediatricians consider offering medication-assisted treatment to their adolescent and

young adult patients with severe opioid use disorders or discuss referrals to other providers for this service. If you're concerned about a patient's opioid or fentanyl use share the San Diego County's Access and Crisis line (888) 724-7240 for information about treatment and counseling options.

Take Action | For patients with severe opioid use disorders discuss the importance of having naloxone, an opioid reversal drug in the home in case of overdose. Naloxone can be purchased at pharmacies in San Diego without a prescription or free from a local substance use prevention coalition. Naloxone is easy to administer and can be lifesaving. To find naloxone near you visit sdpdarf.org. Always call 911 if there is an overdose.

