

# What You Need to Know About Youth & Fentanyl

## WHAT IS FENTANYL AND WHY DO YOUTH NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT?

Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid that is **50 to 100 times as strong as heroin and morphine** and carries a **high risk for addiction and dependence**. Fentanyl produces effects such as relaxation, euphoria, pain relief, sedation, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, urinary retention, pupillary constriction, and respiratory depression. The respiratory depression, or slowing of breathing, is linked to the high rates of overdose and death in high doses or when combined with other substances. **Due to its high potency, fentanyl can be nearly impossible to detect when combined with other substances without drug testing equipment.** This highlights the extreme importance of education about the dangers of fentanyl among youth.

Fentanyl is often talked about within two different contexts:

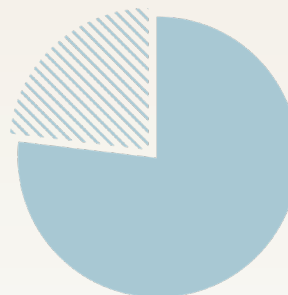
- **Pharmaceutical fentanyl** is most often used in hospital settings during or immediately after surgery to reduce severe pain, but can be prescribed for at-home use, most often as fentanyl patches (Duragesic®).<sup>1</sup>
- **Illicitly manufactured fentanyl** is produced illegally and varies widely in quality and potency. It is most often mixed into other drugs to increase their effects.<sup>1</sup>

Youth may be **unintentionally exposed to fentanyl** in a variety of ways.

- Most commonly, youth may unknowingly be exposed to illegally manufactured fentanyl when using **drugs that have been “laced” or fentanyl has been mixed into another substance.**<sup>3</sup> Fentanyl can be colored or white and is often found in **fake or counterfeit pills** that look like OxyContin®, Xanax®, Adderall® and **other pharmaceutical medications**, including liquid products like nasal sprays and eye drops.<sup>1,4</sup> Fake or counterfeit pills can be purchased from the internet,<sup>7</sup> such as through social media sites.<sup>4</sup>
- Although uncommon, youth may come into contact with prescribed pharmaceutical fentanyl at home if medications are not stored properly.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW DOES FENTANYL IMPACT YOUTH?

Between 2020 and 2021, **drug overdose deaths among youth aged 14-18 years increased 20%**, with researchers identifying fentanyl as the primary cause.<sup>6</sup> In 2021, an overwhelming 77% of teen drug overdose deaths were linked to fentanyl.<sup>6</sup>



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## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF FENTANYL OVERDOSE

- Small, constricted “pinpoint” pupils.
- Loss of consciousness (unable to wake up).
- Slow, shallow or stopped breathing.
- Choking or gurgling sounds.
- Cold and/or clammy skin.

## FENTANYL OVERDOSE REVERSAL

If you suspect that someone is suffering from a fentanyl overdose, there is a medication known as **naloxone (Narcan®)** that can be administered as a nasal spray **to reverse the signs and symptoms of the overdose and prevent death.** Naloxone is easy to administer, does not carry undue risk if administered incorrectly and is often available as an over-the-counter medication.



## REFERENCES

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