

Enhancing Harm Reduction Services in Health Departments: Fentanyl Test Strips and Other Drug Checking Equipment

Q&A Handout

Presenters & Moderators

KC Wu, MPH, National Council for Mental Wellbeing (kcw@thenationalcouncil.org)

Brad Finegood, MA, LMHC, Seattle-King County Public Health (Brad.Finegood@kingcounty.gov)

Amber Tejada, Hepatitis Education Project (ambert@hep.org)

Ainsley Bryce, Holler Harm Reduction (ainsley@hollerharmreduction.org)

Colin Miller, UNC Street Drug Analysis Lab (cwm@unc.edu)

Anne Siegler, DrPH, Consultant with National Council (annesiegler.consulting@gmail.com)

Questions

Q: Is the fentanyl test strips brief available online now?

KC: Here is the [link to the brief](#).

Q: Are fentanyl test strips able to test for all three, fentanyl, benzos and xylazine; or are there substance specific test strips?

Brad: All different test strips.

Q: Are test strips available with 340B pricing?

Brad: I don't think so. Not CLIA waived.

Q: Do you need to have a CLIA waiver to do fentanyl testing?

Anne: Nope!

Q: I'm curious about the ease of use of FTS. I have heard from HR partners that they are hard to use correctly.

Anne: I think they're generally pretty easy to use. Here's a [study from RI](#) with about 100 young people who use drugs. They found that "Among all participants, 79 (98%) reported confidence in their ability to use the test strips and 77 (95%) wanted to use them in the future." And here's a [study from Philly](#) that found that people used the strips easily, but some did find that reading the test results was confusing.

Q: It was really interesting to hear it took about 14 months of testing to feel comfortable reading the FTIR results. Have you done any analysis looking at concordance between the FTIR results you get and



what is found in the confirmatory lab results? (For context, we are preparing to launch drug checking pilots here in NYS and this is an indicator we plan to look at!)

Brad: Ya. We have been pretty right on. But again the 5% cutoff on reading is a thing.

Q: I've used fentanyl test strips for years and instructed folks on how to use them, but only recently received an instructional sheet and I was amazed at how complex the instructions were verses how we usually teach on the street. Would you say that the test strips require the level of precision outlined on formal instructions?

Brad: I would. There's been a number of substances that can result in false positives if the dilution is not done properly.

Q: Our participants have low uptake of the fentanyl test strips because they choose to use fentanyl and it's in all the "heroin." Any ideas?

Anne: In places where fentanyl is in all of the heroin supply, like you said, test strips are of limited utility. They can only tell you yes/no if fentanyl is in the supply. In your context, test strips are more useful for testing other types of drugs (stimulants, etc.), which may or may not contain fentanyl.

Q: Any tips on how to partner with colleges and universities to hand out testing strips? They're very worried about liability, etc. Thank you!

Brad: Depends on what your local laws state. Reach out to groups that already operate on campus like [End Overdose](#).

Q: Is it true that the medication Clonidine could be used as an agonist for Xylazine like methadone is used for people who use opioids?

Brad: Xylazine is an analog of clonidine and functions similarly, but I wouldn't prescribe it as a maintenance drug for folks consuming xylazine. I've heard that a benzo taper works well for xylazine detox, so I'd recommend that over clonidine.

Q: Do you think you're not seeing Xylazine because Seattle does such a good job testing their substances and it hasn't been able to infiltrate the supply? Or do you think it's just a geographical thing? Or any other ideas?

Amber: I honestly think that our lack of xylazine comes down to the hyperlocal variability of the drug supply and the routes by which drugs make their way to different regions.

Q: We are not seeing Xylazine in our area yet - could anyone provide some good resources that we could utilize to educate our staff and/or clients?

Anne: Lots of good resources out there. Here are a couple: Here's a good [guide on xylazine for people who use drugs](#). And here's a good [presentation from the National Harm Reduction Coalition](#).



Q: Where can clients get xylazine testing strips? Xylazine test strips are from which company? Are they available commercially?

Amber: The strips are distributed by BTNX, and I do not believe that they are commercially available just yet. Your local public health department or harm reduction organization may have some.

Q: We've found that many people don't want to "waste" any of the drug for testing. How are people addressing/working with this?

Amber: We tell people that we use a sample about half the size of a grain of rice and can generally give most of that back to you depending on whether or not the participant is interested in secondary analysis.

