

## Understanding Fentanyl and Avoiding Accidental Exposure

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### **What is Fentanyl?**

Fentanyl is a prescription drug used to treat or manage severe pain in patients, most often after surgery and for end-stage cancer. It is highly addictive and up to 100 times more potent than morphine.

Fentanyl is legally produced in five forms: lozenge, oral tablet, oral spray, trans-dermal (skin) patches, and intravenous (IV) medication. Fentanyl (Duragesic®) patches are the most commonly prescribed form of the medication. Patches should be kept in a secure location. Used patches may retain more than 50 percent of the fentanyl, so the risk of exposure remains. The FDA recommends disposing of used patches by folding them in half with the sticky sides together, and then flushing them down a toilet. They should not be placed in the household trash where children or pets can find them.

Fentanyl is also illegally produced as a powder for snorting, smoking, or injecting. Additionally, synthetic variants of fentanyl (e.g., Carfentanil) are commonly used by individuals seeking intense highs upon developing tolerance to other opioids. Carfentanil is 100 times stronger than fentanyl and 10,000 times stronger than morphine. It is often mixed with heroin by dealers. Synthetic forms of fentanyl pose the greatest risk for accidental overdose to users and accidental exposure to first responders due to their potency. A deadly dose of synthetic fentanyl could be as little as 2mg, similar to just 2 grains of salt.

Slang references for fentanyl include China Girl, Dance Fever, TNT, Jackpot, Murder 8, Apache, Goodfella, Tango, and Cash. China White and Poison are synthetic-fentanyl and heroin mixtures.

### **What should you do if you encounter Fentanyl during your casework?**

If any information alleges fentanyl is in a home or in the possession of case members, it is recommended law enforcement accompany you to the home. Due to the rise of fentanyl use, law enforcement personnel often have access to Naloxone (i.e., Narcan shot), a medication that temporarily reverses the effects of opioids like fentanyl. Always be cautious of your surroundings and avoid direct, physical contact with individuals and surface areas where fentanyl may be present.

In the event you encounter someone overdosing or are concerned of accidental exposure, **call 911 immediately**. Common side effects of fentanyl include nausea, vomiting, itching, difficulty breathing, drowsiness, and unconsciousness. The user may also have bluish nails or lips in addition to difficulty breathing, remaining conscious, or speaking.

**You should never handle fentanyl products, not even with protective gloves**, regardless of whether or not it is prescribed and/or sealed. If you are counting someone's fentanyl, request the prescription owner handle the medication in the manner their pharmacist or prescriber instructed. You simply count the medication while observing. *This is a good practice for all medications.*

### **For more information:**

[https://www.dea.gov/druginfo/Fentanyl\\_BriefingGuideforFirstResponders\\_June2017.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/druginfo/Fentanyl_BriefingGuideforFirstResponders_June2017.pdf)