

Fentanyl (fen·tuh·nil)



Other names

30s/M30s Blues/Blue M30s Mexican Blues/Oxy
Apache China Girl/China Town Dance Fever
Friend Goodfellas Great Bear He-man Jackpot
King Ivory Murder 8 Poison Tango & Cash TNT

What is Fentanyl?

- Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic (lab-made) opioid that is FDA-approved to treat severe pain related to surgery or complex pain conditions. Under the supervision of a licensed medical professional, fentanyl has a legitimate medical use. (1)
- Fentanyl that is made and distributed illegally, sometimes called “illicitly manufactured fentanyl”, has been increasingly found in the drug supply. (2)
- Fentanyl is 50 times more powerful/stronger than heroin and 100 times more powerful/stronger than morphine. (3)
- Fentanyl, sold by itself or mixed with other illicit drugs to increase potency, is often pressed into pills made to look like legitimate prescription pills, but with no oversight or quality control measures, these counterfeit pills often contain lethal doses of fentanyl. (1)
- Two milligrams (2 mg) of fentanyl can be lethal depending on a person's body size, tolerance, and past usage. (1)
- DEA analysis found that 70% of pills tested for fentanyl contained at least 2 mg of fentanyl, which is considered a potentially lethal dose. (1)
- Drugs may contain deadly levels of fentanyl, and you wouldn't be able to see it, taste it, or smell it. It is possible for someone to take a pill without knowing it contains fentanyl. It's also possible to take a pill knowing it contains fentanyl, but with no way of knowing it contains a lethal dose. (3,1)

How is Fentanyl Used?

Fentanyl can be injected, snorted, swallowed, or smoked/inhaled.

Fentanyl in Arizona and the US

- On average, more than five people die every day from an opioid overdose in Arizona. In an overwhelming majority of these cases, fentanyl is the opioid being used, either alone or in other polydrug combinations. (4)
- The latest federal data show 109,680 overdose deaths nationwide in 2022, many from fentanyl. Drug deaths nationwide hit a new record in 2022. (5)

Effects of Fentanyl Use

When a person uses fentanyl, it enters the central nervous system and binds to opioid receptors that are located in areas of the brain known as the “reward pathway” and “pain pathway”. When binding to the pain pathway, opioids provide pain relief. However, when binding to the reward pathway, opioids like fentanyl cause euphoria and release a key neurotransmitter known as dopamine. Dopamine signals the neurons of the body to create a pleasurable feeling or “high”. The brain is naturally wired to repeat processes that trigger the reward pathway. This often leads to repeated use of fentanyl in order to trigger the reward pathway again. Continued fentanyl use causes the brain to adapt to the drug, diminishing its sensitivity, making it hard to feel pleasure from anything besides the drug. When people become addicted to fentanyl, drug seeking and drug use take over their lives.

Fentanyl's effects include:

- drowsiness
- nausea
- confusion
- constipation
- sedation
- problems breathing
- unconsciousness

Signs of an Overdose:

One or more of these could be a sign of a fentanyl overdose:

- Unresponsive/Loss of consciousness/Unable to wake or rouse
- Slow, shallow, weak or **no** breathing
- Choking/snoring/gurgling sound
- Small, constricted “pinpoint” pupils
- Cold and/or clammy skin
- Discolored skin (blue/purple/gray), especially in the lips and nails

What to Do if Someone is Overdosing:

1. Call 911 immediately!
2. Administer naloxone, if available.
3. Try to keep the person awake and breathing.
4. Lay the person on their side (in the recovery position) to prevent choking.
5. Stay with the person until emergency assistance arrives.

(1) <https://www.dea.gov/resources/facts-about-fentanyl>
(2) <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/fentanyl>
(3) <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html>
(4) <https://www.azdhs.gov/opioid/#dashboards-overdose-deaths>
(5) <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/18/1176830906/overdose-death-2022-record#>