

# Fentanyl Fact Sheet

## What are Opioids?

Prescription [Opioids](#) are a family of medications used to treat severe pain. Opioids are an effective medication when used as prescribed, but they carry a high risk of addiction because of the high they can produce. You can develop a tolerance to opioids, meaning you have to take more of the drug to get the same high. This increases the risks of addiction and overdose. Opioids are available in many different forms including patches, powders, pills and sprays.

Examples of opioids include:

- Oxycodone
- Morphine
- Hydromorphone
- **Fentanyl**
- Codeine
- Methadone
- Heroin

## What is Fentanyl?

Non-prescription (illegal) Fentanyl is a dangerous opioid which can be deadly in small amounts. Fentanyl is often prescribed in slow release patches that must be returned in order to receive new ones, however, powdered illegal fentanyl is now being found mixed in street drugs. Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times more toxic than morphine, and has caused hundreds of deaths in Ontario, and all over Canada.

## Why are we concerned?

- Illegal Fentanyl is being pressed into pills to look like prescription drugs, but this kind of Fentanyl has no quality control and can easily go undetected.
- Fentanyl has no smell, taste, or colour making it very difficult to detect and an easy drug to mix into other opioids, street and party drugs.
- When Fentanyl is mixed with other opioids, alcohol, benzodiazepines (Ativan), or stimulants like cocaine, it increases the risk of accidental overdose.
- Drugs can be tampered with at any point! People buying or selling drugs may not be aware if it has been mixed (cut or laced) with ANYTHING before they sell it to you!

## Reduce your Risk

### If you are going to use:

#### 1. Don't Use Alone

- If you overdose when you are alone there will be no one there to help you.
- When using with someone else, don't use at the same time. Be sure your friend is willing to call for help and make a plan for what to do if an overdose happens.
- If you do use alone, tell someone before you use. Leave the door unlocked and have someone come check on you.

- If you have a naloxone kit, tell someone where you keep it!

## 2. Don't Mix Drugs

- Don't mix opioids with other drugs or alcohol.
- Using more than one drug at a time increases your risk of overdose
- If you are going to use multiple drugs, take less of each, and one at a time!

## 3. Go Slow

- The quality of street drugs is unpredictable. Fentanyl is being mixed into both opioid and non opioid drugs:
  - Made as a powder and mixed into cocaine, heroin, and crack.
  - Made as pills and being sold as 'oxycodone' (eighties, oxys) or other pills including ecstasy/MDMA.
- You can't taste, smell or see Fentanyl. Very small amounts can cause an overdose.
- Start using in small amounts and do "testers" (or test doses) to check the strength of what you are using.

## 4. Know your tolerance

- Tolerance is the body's ability to 'handle' the effects of the drug being used. Tolerance to a drug develops over time with regular use.
- Drug tolerance will decrease when somebody has taken a break from using - whether the break is on purpose or forced (like while in treatment, hospital or jail).
- Your tolerance will also change depending on weight, illness, general health status, lack of sleep, using other drugs
- Use less drugs when your tolerance may be lower.

**Your risk of overdose increases if you are a new user or haven't used in 3+ days!**

## 5. Know the signs of an overdose

- They may be nodding off, not waking up easily, or unresponsive
- Slow or no breathing  
Blue lips and fingernails
- Cold and clammy skin
- Their body is limp/ dead weight
- They may be snoring or gurgling
- They may throw up

## 6. Know what to do if you suspect an overdose

- Call 911 Immediately
- Use Naloxone, place them in the recovery position
- Stay with the person

## 7. Carry Naloxone

- Naloxone is a medication that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose.
- Naloxone is available free to people who use drugs and their family and friends!
- Learn more about [Naloxone](#), where to get a kit, and how to deal with a suspected overdose.