

# FENTANYL

- In 2020, 75% of the nearly 92,000 overdoses in the U.S. involved opioids, and 82.3% of U.S. opioid overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids like fentanyl.<sup>1</sup>
- Drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone (primarily fentanyl) have been on the rise, with 56,516 deaths being reported in 2020.<sup>2</sup>
- Fentanyl is being mixed with other substances or marketed as a substance other than fentanyl.<sup>3</sup> Fentanyl can be found combined with other opioids (like heroin), in pressed pills made to look like prescription medications (Xanax, Oxycodone, Adderall), as well as cocaine, MDMA, and methamphetamines to increase their potency due to its low cost.
- Fentanyl is addictive, and up to 100 times stronger than morphine and 50 times stronger than heroin.<sup>3,4</sup>

Because of fentanyl's high potency, there is an increased risk of overdose when using substances that contain fentanyl:

- o One kilogram of fentanyl has the potential to kill 500,000 people<sup>5</sup>
- o 42% of pills tested for fentanyl by the DEA contained a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl.<sup>5</sup> 2 mg of fentanyl, shown in the picture to the right next to a penny, is considered to be a lethal dose.
- Most people consume fentanyl without knowing, which places them at a higher risk for overdose.<sup>6</sup> They believe they are using a "safe" dose, but due to the presence of fentanyl in the supply, it may turn out to be lethal.



Figure 1: Photo from the University of Colorado Boulder: Health and Wellness Services, "5 Things Everyone Should Know about Fentanyl" page.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEDICAL FENTANYL AND ILLICIT FENTANYL

Medical fentanyl is made in a laboratory with regulations and is packaged with accurate dosage labeling. Illicit fentanyl is not regulated and does not have proper labeling to let people know how much they are getting <sup>6</sup>. Illegally manufactured fentanyl is frequently used to "cut" heroin, or it can be found in counterfeit prescription pills.<sup>6</sup>

## MYTHS AND MISINFORMATION SURROUNDING FENTANYL

**Myth #1:** Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues are "resistant to naloxone"

Response: They are opioids and will respond to naloxone if someone is overdosing.

o Naloxone is an FDA-approved opioid antagonist and works to reverse an opioid overdose, including fentanyl overdose, by restoring breath to unconscious overdose victims.<sup>7</sup>

**Myth #2:** You can overdose just by touching fentanyl.

Response: You cannot overdose simply by touching powdered fentanyl.

Response: It is a common myth that you can overdose simply by touching fentanyl. Fentanyl must be introduced into the bloodstream or a mucus membrane for someone to feel the effects.

o The risk of emergency responders being exposed to a dangerous amount of fentanyl is extremely low. Nitrile gloves and an N95 respirator provide sufficient dermal protection and protection from fentanyl particles that may be suspended in the air.<sup>8</sup>

## THE HARM OF MISINFORMATION

Fentanyl myths lead to harmful policies that hurt, instead of help. They create fear and panic among law enforcement and can create devastating consequences for people who are overdosing and need medical attention.<sup>7,9</sup>

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