

# FENTANYL FACT SHEET

## SAFELY RESPONDING TO AN ONSITE OVERDOSE AT WORK

The risk of inadvertent exposure to fentanyl for staff responding to an opioid overdose in their workplace is extremely low. Routine precautions and overdose prevention training are sufficient for managing the risk of unintended fentanyl exposure while responding to a suspected opioid overdose.<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT IS FENTANYL?

**Prescription fentanyl** is a potent synthetic opioid that is used to relieve pain. It may be administered via a patch, injection, lozenge, or spray.

**Non-prescription fentanyl** and its analogues are produced domestically in illegal drug labs or smuggled into Canada from other regions. It may be sold as a powder, a pill, or mixed into other street drugs. Illicit fentanyl is especially dangerous because the strength and concentration of the drug is impossible to know.

"[I]t is very unlikely that small, unintentional skin exposures to tablets or powder would cause significant opioid toxicity, and if toxicity were to occur it would not develop rapidly, allowing time for removal."<sup>2</sup>



### SIGNS OF OPIOID OVERDOSE

- Can't wake the person up
- Breathing is very slow, erratic or has stopped
- Deep snoring or gurgling sounds
- Fingernails or lips are blue or purple
- Body is very limp
- Pupils are very small
- Skin feels cold and clammy

## MYTHS vs. FACTS

*\*Adapted from the Ontario Poison Centre.<sup>3</sup>*

MYTH	FACT
<b>Touching fentanyl powder can poison you.</b>	Inadvertent contact will not cause toxicity. However, if powder remains on the skin and you put your hand in your mouth, the drug could be absorbed.
<b>Rescuers may succumb to opioid overdose when helping victims.</b>	Although very small doses of fentanyl and its analogues can be dangerous, there are no reports of rescuers succumbing to opioid overdoses when helping victims. There are no reports of peers, EMS workers or hospital staff getting ill by providing basic lifesaving care to these victims. Universal precautions should be followed as per usual.

# STEPS TO REDUCE RISKS FOR FIRST AID RESPONDERS



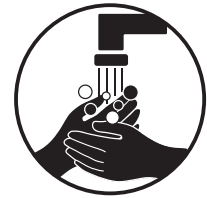
Have Naloxone kits on-site and ensure staff are trained to use them.



Establish an overdose prevention and response protocol.



Wear nitrile gloves and do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.



If you touch fentanyl, immediately wash the area with lots of water.\*

\*Note: Do not attempt to wash with alcohol-based hand sanitizers as they do not remove opioids from the skin.

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## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Health, British Columbia. (2017). Guidance statement regarding Personal Protective Equipment for Emergency Medical Services and Health Care Workers dealing with overdose victims. Retrieved from: <https://www.fentanyl-safety.com/wp-content/uploads/UpdatedGuidance-statement-PPE-EMS-HCW-Jan2017.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>American College of Medical Toxicology (ACMT) & American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT). (2017). ACMT and AACT Position Statement: Preventing Occupational Fentanyl and Fentanyl Analog Exposure to Emergency Responders. Retrieved from: [https://www.acmt.net/\\_Library/Fentanyl\\_Position/Fentanyl\\_PPE\\_Emergency\\_Responders\\_.pdf](https://www.acmt.net/_Library/Fentanyl_Position/Fentanyl_PPE_Emergency_Responders_.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Ontario Poison Centre. (2017). Opioid Overdose Management. Retrieved from: <http://www.ontariopoisoncentre.ca/health-care-professionals/opioid-management/opioid-management.aspx>

Find more resources and information about opioids at:  
[www.peterboroughdrugstrategy.com](http://www.peterboroughdrugstrategy.com)

