

FENTANYL

31 AUGUST

INTERNATIONAL
OVERDOSE
AWARENESS DAY

WHAT IS FENTANYL?

Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid commonly used in medicine for strong pain relief. Fentanyl can be up to 100 times stronger than morphine and other prescription opioids and its effects come quickly. Similar chemical compounds like carfentanyl and acetylfentanyl (fentanyl analogues) tend to be even stronger at small amounts and have even higher risk of overdose.

Illegally-produced fentanyl is more common in North America than in other parts of the world like Europe or Australia, where non-medical fentanyl use tends to be from diverted pharmaceutical supplies.

EFFECTS AND SIGNS OF OVERDOSE

Like all opioids, fentanyl attaches to receptors in the brain to block pain signals and slow down the central nervous system. Opioids typically have a relaxing and euphoric effect but can slow breathing and heart rate. Too many opioids, and when combined with other depressant drugs, can slow breathing to dangerous levels by stopping the natural urge to breathe in, leading to brain damage or death.

Signs of overdose can include:

- Not responding / cannot be woken
- Limp body and cold or clammy skin
- Irregular, shallow, or slow breathing (less than 12 breaths per minute)
- Snoring or gurgling sounds (can appear like deep sleep)
- Blue / pale or grey / ashen lips or fingertips
- Possible vomiting

OVERDOSE RESPONSE

Sometimes it can take hours for an opioid death to occur. Non-fatal overdoses can still cause brain damage if a person is not breathing properly. Immediate action could save a life.

Check for vital signs:

A Alert: Not responding to voice, touch, or pain

B Breathing: Noisy? Shallow? Slow? Stopped? Strange snoring or gurgling?

C Colour: Blue or pale lips or fingertips (lighter skin) or grey / ashy colour (darker skin)

If you see any of these signs, act immediately.

Before you act: Check for danger (sharp objects, chemicals, traffic, etc.).

Try to get a response from the person by calling their name, squeezing their shoulder firmly or rubbing knuckles firmly across their sternum (chest bone).

If no response (person is breathing): Put them in the recovery position. Make sure their head is supported, airways are open and monitor vital signs closely.

If no response (person not breathing): Use naloxone (Narcan) and/or start rescue breathing.

Call an ambulance: follow operator instructions and stay on the line.

How to use naloxone / Narcan®:

1. Assemble the naloxone according to packet instructions.
2. Give the smallest dose possible and record the time (keep packaging and give it with time of dose to paramedics when they arrive).
3. Wait 2-4 minutes and stay with the person.
4. If the person does not start breathing, give another dose of naloxone and/or start rescue breathing (2 breathes every 5 seconds).

5. If the person starts breathing, place them in the recovery position and monitor vital signs until an ambulance arrives.

Note: Naloxone will only temporarily reverse an opioid overdose. It will not reverse the effects of other drugs.

Never leave the person alone as they can 'drop' again when naloxone wears off.

Rescue breathing (if you DO NOT HAVE naloxone):

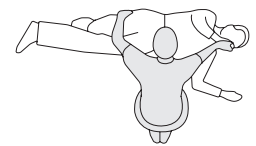
- Roll the person onto their back, supporting their head.
- Tilt head to open airway (one hand on forehead and one under the chin).
- Clear airways if blocked.
- Pinch nose and create a mouth-to-mouth seal.
- Give 2 quick every 5 seconds (check for rising chest – not stomach – after each breath).
- Maintain rescue breaths until
 - the person starts breathing on their own
 - an ambulance arrives
 - someone else can take over for you.

WHAT NOT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A SUSPECTED OVERDOSE

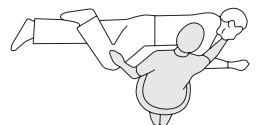
- Do **NOT** allow a person to 'sleep it off' (they may stop breathing).
- Do **NOT** leave the person alone -always stay until an ambulance arrives.
- Do **NOT** give the person any other medicine, drugs, or anything to eat or drink.
- Do **NOT** try to induce vomiting, put them in the shower / bath or slap them to 'wake them up'.

The Recovery Position

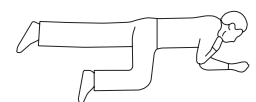
Support face Place the arm nearest to you at right angles to the body. Place their other hand against their cheek.



Lift leg Get hold of the far leg just above the knee and pull it up, keeping the foot flat on the ground.



Roll over Keep their hand pressed against their cheek and pull on the upper leg to roll them towards you and onto their side.



TIME TO
REMEMBER.
TIME TO
ACT.



International Overdose
Awareness Day

A Pennington Institute Initiative

For more information visit
overdoseday.com