

Fentanyl



Because of its potency and toxicity, fentanyl can kill quickly. It's critical that people call 911 immediately when they suspect someone is having a drug overdose so they can receive a potentially life-saving medication called naloxone.

WHAT IS IT?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opiate analgesic similar to but much more potent than morphine. It is typically used during anesthesia, to treat patients with severe pain, or to manage pain after surgery. It is sometimes used to treat people with chronic pain who are physically tolerant to opiates. It is a schedule II prescription drug. However, recent overdoses have been connected to illegally produced and trafficked fentanyl, not diverted pharmaceutical fentanyl.

NAMES*

In its prescription form, fentanyl is known as Actiq, Duragesic and Sublimaze. Street names for the drug include: Apache, China girl, China white, dance fever, friend, goodfella, jackpot, murder 8, TNT, or Tango and Cash.

EFFECTS*

- ▶ Like heroin, morphine and other opioid drugs, fentanyl works by binding to the body's opiate receptors, highly concentrated in areas of the brain that control pain and emotions. When opiate drugs bind to these receptors, they can drive up dopamine levels in the brain's reward areas, producing a state of euphoria and relaxation – and in some people, the urge to use the drug again and again. Medications called opiate receptor antagonists act by blocking the effects of opiate drugs. Naloxone is one such antagonist. Overdoses of fentanyl should be treated immediately with an opiate antagonist.
- ▶ When prescribed by a physician, fentanyl is often administered via injection, transdermal patch or in lozenge form. However, the type of fentanyl associated with recent overdoses was produced illegally in underground laboratories and sometimes mixed with (or substituted for) heroin in a powder form.
- ▶ Mixing fentanyl with street-sold heroin or cocaine markedly amplifies their potency and potential dangers, including the risk of death. Effects include: euphoria, drowsiness/respiratory depression and arrest, nausea, confusion, constipation, sedation, unconsciousness, coma, tolerance and addiction.

BY THE NUMBERS**

Drug overdose deaths in Ohio increased from 2,110 in 2013 with 84 involving fentanyl (3.9 percent), to 2,482 in 2014 with 502 involving fentanyl (20.2 percent). The Ohio Department of Health is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to better understand Ohio's fentanyl-related drug overdose data to inform decision-making to address this issue.

The latest Ohio findings come amid recent warnings from federal addiction and health policy experts, urging vigilance around the toxicity of fentanyl, a Schedule II synthetic narcotic that in its prescription form is estimated to be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, according to the CDC. Fentanyl drug reports based on law enforcement drug seizures increased by 300 percent in the U.S. from the second half of 2013 to the first half of 2014, according to the DEA. This increase was especially pronounced in the South, Northeast and Midwest.¹

* National Institute on Drug Abuse website **Ohio Department of Health 2014 Ohio Drug Overdose Preliminary Data Report

¹ "Drug Report" – The National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) is a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) program that collects drug chemistry analysis results from cases analyzed by state, local and federal forensic laboratories. These laboratories analyze substances secured in law enforcement operations across the country. Source -- U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Office of Diversion Control. 2015. National Forensic Laboratory Information System Report: Opiates and Related Drugs Reported in NFLIS, 2009-2014. Springfield, VA: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.