



# Fentanyl Test Strips

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is fentanyl?

- Fentanyl comes in two types: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illegally made fentanyl. Both are synthetic opioids made in a laboratory. Doctors prescribe pharmaceutical fentanyl to relieve severe pain, especially after surgery and for advanced-stage cancer.
- Most recent cases of fentanyl-related overdose are due to illegally made fentanyl, which is sold on illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect.
- Fentanyl may be pressed to resemble prescription medication, such as Xanax, or mixed with other drugs, such as methamphetamine and cocaine.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine; a small amount of fentanyl contamination can significantly increase the risk of overdose.<sup>3</sup>
- There were 620 deaths involving both fentanyl and stimulants in 2023. This makes up 65 percent of all stimulant-involved drug overdose deaths during that year.
- The most common combination of polysubstance use was fentanyl and methamphetamine, with the second most common being fentanyl and cocaine.<sup>4</sup>

### What are fentanyl test strips (FTS), and how are they used?

- Fentanyl test strips (FTS) are a type of inexpensive drug testing technology designed to detect the presence of fentanyl in samples before they are taken.
- To use the strips, testers dissolve a small amount of the substance in water and dip the test strip into the liquid for 15 seconds. The test strips are very sensitive, so a small amount of drug residue is enough to get a result. After that, the test strip is placed on a flat surface until the results appear, usually within 5 minutes. One line means that fentanyl is present in the sample, while two lines mean the result is negative.
- On April 7, 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration announced that federal funding could be used to buy FTS.<sup>5</sup>
- On August 28, 2023, the Missouri Legislature made it legal to create, have, sell, give or use any tools or materials to test controlled substances for fentanyl.<sup>6</sup>

### Are FTS accurate and reliable?

- The fentanyl test strips can be effective at detecting fentanyl at a 96-100 percent accuracy.
- FTS are a quick, inexpensive and simple way to check for drugs.
- Testers need to be aware of a few limits to this method. They might not give an accurate result if not used correctly.
- Due to illegal drug manufacturing, drug supplies are often inconsistent. They could lead to one part of a drug containing fentanyl while another part may not, leading to inaccurate test

results.<sup>7</sup> FTS cannot tell how much fentanyl is in the sample. For these reasons, it is important for testers to be informed and practice safer use methods. Safe use practices, such as always keeping naloxone nearby, never using alone and starting with a smaller dose of a substance, are important methods of risk reduction when it comes to substance use.

## What is known about how FTS supports safety for people who use drugs?

- FTS can provide people who use drugs with more information to keep them safe. An assessment in San Francisco found that using FTS increased awareness about fentanyl and encouraged people to take safety measures to prevent overdose.<sup>8</sup> In a program in North Carolina, 81 percent of people with access to FTS tested their drugs before using them. Those who had a positive test result were five times more likely to change their behavior to reduce the risk of overdose.<sup>9</sup> A study in Rhode Island found that young adults using heroin, cocaine or illegally obtained prescription pills were more likely to change their behavior in ways that decreased the risk of overdose when their drugs tested positive for fentanyl.<sup>10</sup>

## References

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- <sup>4</sup> Missouri Vital Statistics Death Certificate Data (2023)
- <sup>5</sup> Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association. Fentanyl Test Strips. May 2021.
- <sup>6</sup> “579.088.” Revisor.mo.gov, [revisor.mo.gov/main/OneSection.aspx?section=579.088&bid=54294&hl=fentanyl%u2044](http://revisor.mo.gov/main/OneSection.aspx?section=579.088&bid=54294&hl=fentanyl%u2044). Accessed 14 June 2024.
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- <sup>8</sup> Harm Reduction Coalition. Fentanyl Test Strip Pilot: San Francisco 2017-2018. Online: <https://harmreduction.org/issue-area/overdose-prevention-issue-area/fentanyl-test-strip-pilot/>
- <sup>9</sup> N Nicholas C. Peiper, Sarah Duhart Clarke, Louise B. Vincent, Dan Ciccarone, Alex H. Kral, Jon E. Zibbell. Fentanyl test strips as an opioid overdose prevention strategy: Findings from a syringe services program in the Southeastern United States. *Int J Drug Policy*. Sep 28, 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> Krieger MS, Goedel WC, Buxton JA, et. al. (2018). Use of rapid fentanyl test strips among young adults who use drugs. *Int J Drug Policy*, In Press Oct. 2018.