

Fentanyl and Fentanyl Test Strips Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



1. What is fentanyl?

[Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid](#) that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. Fentanyl is a major contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses in California and the United States.

There are two types of fentanyl: 1) pharmaceutical fentanyl and 2) illicitly manufactured fentanyl (illicit fentanyl or IMF). Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain, such as while in the hospital for and after surgery or for advanced-stage cancer. Illicit fentanyl is unregulated and distributed through illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect.

2. Why is fentanyl dangerous?

Fentanyl is extremely potent relative to other opioids. It can more rapidly cause respiratory depression and arrest. Illicit fentanyl can be added to other drugs to make them cheaper, more powerful, and more addictive. People who use drugs may be unaware if their drugs contain fentanyl. A very small amounts of fentanyl can be deadly and the amount of fentanyl in substances varies dramatically. This can lead to a life-threatening or fatal overdose event.

3. What forms of illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF) are being sold?

IMF is found in the drug market in different forms. As a liquid, IMF can be found in nasal sprays, eye drops, or dropped onto paper to look like small candies. As a powder, IMF looks like many other drugs. Powdered IMF can be mixed with drugs like heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA). Powdered IMF can also be made into pills that look like prescription opioids like Oxycontin or benzodiazepines like Xanax.

4. What are fentanyl test strips (FTS)?

FTS are a [harm reduction](#) strategy designed to reduce the negative consequences of drug use, including the risk of fatal and nonfatal overdose. Anyone can purchase and use FTS to test for the presence of fentanyl in a drug. This [Fentanyl Test Strips to Prevent Overdose](#) fact sheet contains additional information about FTS.

5. Where can FTS be purchased?

FTS cost approximately \$1.00 each and can be purchased from several vendors, including:

- [BTNX](#)
- [Dance Safe](#)
- [North America Syringe Exchange Network](#) (NASEN) Buyers Club

Free or low-cost FTS are available to individuals at California's [syringe services programs](#) (SSPs) through the California Harm Reduction Supplies Clearinghouse.

6. Who can organizations and coalitions partner with to distribute FTS?

Organizations can partner with harm reduction agencies such as SSPs and organizations that offer supplies, education, and resources; and in-person, contactless services, including health clinics. Organizations can also partner with agencies that have multiple locations that serve different populations to increase the equitable distribution of FTS.

7. How many FTS should be included in a kit provided to a person who uses drugs?

A minimum of two FTS should be provided in each kit to persons who use drugs. If the first test comes up negative, it is recommended to test the drugs a second time (the same mixture/sample). Additional test strips may be also provided.

8. What education and materials should be included when distributing FTS?

- Education on fentanyl (e.g., [Facts About Fentanyl](#)).
- Instructions on how to use the FTS (a sticker with instructions can be placed directly onto the FTS package).
- Sterilized water in a package/bottle, about a one (1) ounce amount, to use for testing.
- Small cup or container that has a marked measurement to indicate the amount of water that should be used for the test.
- Stir stick for mixing the drug sample with the water.
- [Naloxone](#), a life-saving medication used to reverse an opioid overdose. With a fentanyl overdose, two or more doses of naloxone may need to be given. Learn how to use naloxone with this [naloxone training video](#).

9. Are there instructional trainings and resources available to learn how to test for fentanyl and use the FTS?

Yes, the following is a sampling of FTS resources available.

- [FTS Training Video](#)
- [FTS Brochure](#)
- [FTS Instructions: Quick Reference Guide](#)
- [FTS Instructions](#)

10. Are FTS accurate and reliable?

A [FTS 2018 study](#) found that FTS were accurate at detecting fentanyl when it was present in samples of street drugs obtained by law enforcement. This same study found that FTS are unlikely to produce false negative results.

11. Are there limitations and testing considerations for using FTS?

- FTS do not measure the quantity or potency of fentanyl present in a drug sample.
- FTS have an extremely low detection threshold and may detect incidental contamination of a drug sample, such as contamination by other drugs being packaged in the same area.
- There is emerging evidence that FTS may be cross-reactive with certain levels of methamphetamine, returning false positives for fentanyl when the sample is not sufficiently diluted. When testing methamphetamine drug samples for

fentanyl contamination, the sample should be diluted in a greater amount of water [about half (1/2) a cup, rather than one (1) ounce] to produce accurate results.

- Test the drug sample with at least two FTS. If the first FTS comes up negative when testing a product, it is recommended to test the product a second time.
- Pills, including those that are intended to be smoked, should be tested prior to use. Crush the sample and test a small amount.
- Testing a used drug sample, such as drugs remaining on foil or in pipe filters, does not work. Test drugs before they are used, not after use.
- When fentanyl (or a fentanyl analog) is mixed with heroin, cocaine, or other drugs, it is NEVER mixed evenly. The powder from one side of a baggie (or on the edge of a pressed tablet) may contain no fentanyl at all, yet the powder from the other side may contain a fatal dose. This is called the "chocolate chip cookie effect" and is why it is best to test every bit of the drug you intend to consume.
- Learn more about [harm reduction practices](#).

12. How should FTS be stored and what is the shelf life?

For best results, store FTS in a temperature range of 36-86°F (2-30°C). FTS do not need to be stored away from the environmental elements (e.g., rain). FTS have a shelf life of two years from the manufacturer date. Be sure to read and follow all test strip instructions.

Additional Resources and Treatment:

- Visit [CDPH's Overdose Prevention Initiative](#) webpages for more resources.
- Learn about fentanyl and download resources from the [National Harm Reduction Coalition: Fentanyl](#).
- Connect with a local SSP for information, support, and prevention tools in a friendly, respectful, and non-judgmental manner. [Counties with Authorized SSP's in California](#).
- Partner with [California NEXT Distro](#), an online and mail-based harm reduction program.
- Promote and use the [Never Use Alone hotline](#) (800-484-3721). This hotline is a free service that a person can call when they are using drugs alone. An operator stays on the line and notifies emergency services if the persons stop responding.
- Learn about [California's Good Samaritan law](#) (Health and Safety Code § 1799.102), which protects those giving emergency medical care at the scene of a medical emergency, including giving naloxone.
- Visit [Fent Check](#) which offers free [fentanyl test strips](#) in the California's Bay Area.
- Visit the Department of Health Care Service's (DHCS) [Choose Change California](#) statewide campaign webpage for information and education on treatment options and support.
- Learn about [California's minor consent law](#) (Family Code § 6929), including medical care and counseling.
- Learn about [controlled substance testing](#) laws in California (Health and Safety Code § 11014.5 and 11364.5) – effective January 1, 2023.
- Use and promote the non-emergency Treatment Referral Line (1-800-879-2772). This DHCS referral line connects people to local resources and services from their County Alcohol and Other Drugs Program Office.