

ALERT!

Fentanyl: Like Heroin But Worse



As if the deadly epidemic of opioid drugs (heroin, oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine...) wasn't already bad enough, there is now an even more dangerous drug hitting the streets with increasing frequency. Fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid analgesic, has been responsible for a surge in overdose deaths during the past few years.

Fentanyl was synthesized in 1960. Under some conditions it has legitimate uses as a prescription painkiller. But it has also been abused as a recreational drug since the 1970's. For the most part, however, fentanyl was not commonly seen on the streets until about ten years ago when it briefly became more prevalent due to its production in clandestine labs. With the closure of these labs the fentanyl problem subsided for a while until around 2014—when it returned with a vengeance.

Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times more potent than other opioids such as heroin and morphine. Doctors sometimes prescribe fentanyl for severe pain, for certain medical procedures, or to manage pain after surgery. Because of the strength of this drug, the dose must be very carefully monitored by a health care provider to make sure that the person prescribed fentanyl

does not overdose. When prescribed responsibly and taken appropriately, it can be a useful drug for people whose condition requires it.

On the street though fentanyl is increasingly being mixed with drugs like heroin and cocaine—amplifying their potency and danger. To compensate for less powerful or low-quality drugs dealers sometimes lace their products with fentanyl. Many people who overdose on fentanyl have no idea that the drugs they are using contain fentanyl. You can't smell it, see it, or taste it. But it can take your life. Drugs laced with fentanyl are extremely dangerous because users don't know what they are putting into their bodies. Fentanyl is so strong that it can quickly cause an overdose, stopping a person's respiration.

In many areas counterfeit pain and anxiety medications containing fentanyl have hit the illegal drug market. The pills, which are disguised as common prescription drugs, are responsible for a growing number of overdose deaths around the country. Even though drugs bought on the street may look like real prescription pharmaceuticals, they could be deadly. Never use any prescription drug unless it was responsibly prescribed to you by a doctor and dispensed by a pharmacy.

Along with the problem of unintentional use, a growing number of drug users are deliberately taking fentanyl to get high. Street names for fentanyl include: goodfella, eighties, Chinese food, ice cream, Apache, China girl, greenies, apples, and dance fever.

In emergencies, fentanyl and other opioid overdoses can be reversed if the drug naloxone (Narcan) is administered promptly. In more and more states naloxone is being distributed to injection drug users, law enforcement officers, and other laypersons to use in the event of overdose. ☹️

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