



**FENTANYL**

**WHAT TO  
DO**

# BEWARE!

In April 2017, fentanyl led to the overdose deaths of at least four people per day in British Columbia. There is now growing concern that this wave of fatal overdoses will reach Québec since Canada is the second-highest consumer of prescription fentanyl after the United States.

The central nervous system depressant is a synthetic opiate painkiller with a high risk of addiction.

It is so potent that users risk death from respiratory failure. When taken without medical supervision in higher doses than prescribed, fentanyl is a silent killer.

## **A VERY LOW DOSE OF FENTANYL CAN CAUSE A FATAL OVERDOSE.**

Dealers use fentanyl to cut into other psychotropic substances such as heroin and cocaine to increase their effects. Often, users are not aware that the drugs are laced since fentanyl is odourless, colourless and tasteless. The scheme has led to a sharp increase in overdose deaths—even among occasional drug users—and created a veritable public health crisis in Canada. And the newer the user, the higher the risk.

# MEDICAL AND ILLICIT USES

## MEDICAL USE

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Prescribed as a last resort painkiller, fentanyl is meant to manage intense and postoperative pain. It is 40 times more potent than heroin and 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. It generally comes in transdermal patch form and is sold by pharmacists under different names, including Duragesic®, Actiq® and Sublimaze®.

Because the drug is very powerful and highly addictive, patients who are prescribed fentanyl remain under medical supervision. The prescribed use of fentanyl for medical purposes largely reduces the risks. However, medical use can quickly turn into opioid misuse when patients develop an addiction to the medication.

## ILLICIT USE

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On the black market, fentanyl is used recreationally for its sedative effect. By releasing dopamine in the brain, the drug creates a sensation of euphoria, relaxation, drowsiness and, finally, fulfillment. There are several ways to absorb it: skin contact, oral ingestion, inhalation, snorting and injection.

Illicit non-prescription fentanyl is often sold as another drug (e.g. synthetic heroin or OxyContin) and under several different names, including Apache, Green Beans, P'tites vertes, Egg White, Goodfella, Patch, China Girl, China White, Murder 8 and TNT.

# TAKING FENTANYL WITHOUT KNOWING IT

When it comes to illicit substances, now more than ever, users never really know the intensity or type of psychotropic drug they are consuming.

Undisclosed or sold in other forms, fentanyl makes all recreational drug users—regular and occasional—more vulnerable. It has changed the rules and transformed all drug use into a Russian roulette-style game of chance.

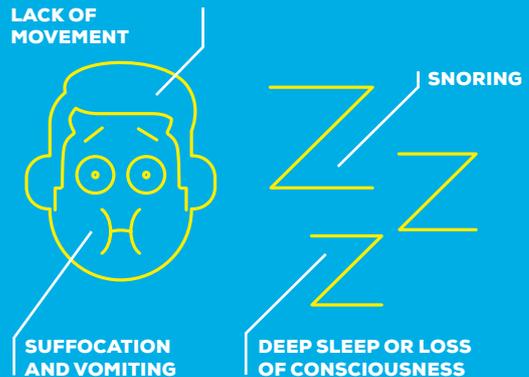
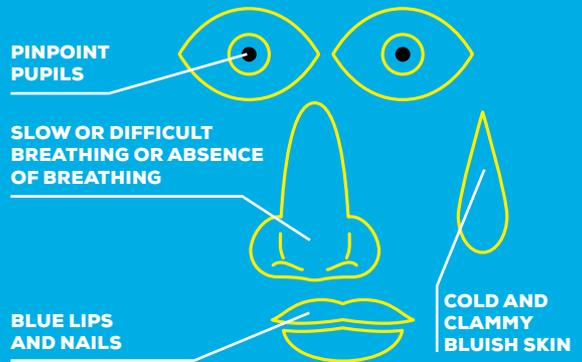
## TODAY, THE GREATEST RISK IS TO USE FENTANYL WITHOUT KNOWING IT.

Combining fentanyl and alcohol or other depressants makes it particularly lethal and involves an increased risk of overdose by exposing the user to respiratory depression. The risks associated with the drug are even higher in new users who have not developed a tolerance for opioids and in users who have been clean or using less than usual.

# SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE

Taking too much or too many substances can lead to an overdose. But not all overdoses are fatal. Many occasional drug users who have overdosed on what they thought was heroin, cocaine, oxycodone or something else actually took fentanyl without knowing it.

## A USER WHO DOES NOT RECEIVE IMMEDIATE CARE WHEN OVERDOSING ON OPIOIDS COULD DIE FROM RESPIRATORY ARREST.



# WHEN SOMEONE IS OVERDOSING HERE'S WHAT TO DO

**1. CALL 9-1-1:** Since May 4, 2017, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act provides legal protection for people who witness an overdose or who overdose and contact emergency services for help.

**2. IF YOU HAVE NALOXONE, ADMINISTER IT:** Naloxone (Narcan®) temporarily reverses the effects of an opioid overdose (including fentanyl) for approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

Because the effect of the antidote is only temporary and a second dose is sometimes required, it is critical to call 9-1-1. Another overdose could occur when the effects of the naloxone begin to wear off. While some new strains of fentanyl are resistant to naloxone, it is always best to administer the antidote whenever an opioid overdose is suspected. Naloxone is available in drug stores across Québec. The pharmacist will explain how to use it.

**3. PLACE THE PERSON ON HIS/HER SIDE** to avoid suffocation.

**4. MAKE SURE THE PERSON IS BREATHING** and begin CPR if necessary.

Go to [WWW.REDCROSS.CA](http://WWW.REDCROSS.CA) for more information on CPR.

**5. STAY WITH THE PERSON** until help arrives.

# DON'T LET THE SITUATION WORSEN. REMEMBER TO NEVER:

**WAIT** before administering the naloxone

**USE CARDIAC MASSAGE** if the person still has a pulse

**LEAVE** the person **ALONE**

Give the person **A COLD SHOWER** or bath

**LEAVE** the person **ON HIS/HER BACK**

**HIT THE PERSON** to help him/her regain consciousness

Give the person **OTHER DRUGS**

**INJECT** a saline solution

# PREVENT AN OVERDOSE

**AVOID USING** any type of psychotropic substance purchased on the black market. This is always the best way to avoid an overdose.

If you use fentanyl for medical reasons, only take the **DOSAGE RECOMMENDED** by your physician. If you begin to increase the dosage or if you feel any type of discomfort, tell your doctor immediately.

# IF YOU USE ILLICIT DRUGS

- Never use alone and make sure you have naloxone on hand
- Follow the naloxone training kit program
- Try a small amount of the substance before you use all of it
- use less, especially if you are a new user or if you have been clean
- do not mix drugs (e.g. cocaine and opioids)
- inject intravenous drugs slowly
- Whenever possible, get drug test kits and test the substance before you use it. Remember that the kits cannot detect all the strains of fentanyl, so exercise caution.
- Go to a supervised injection site where users can consume their drugs intravenously:
  - in a safe and hygienic facility
  - under supervision provided by qualified staff
  - legally

## RESOURCES

Centre Québécois de Lutte  
aux Dépendances (CQLD)

[WWW.CQLD.CA/EN](http://WWW.CQLD.CA/EN)

La Direction régionale  
de santé publique de Montréal :

[WWW.DSP.SANTEMONTREAL.QC.CA](http://WWW.DSP.SANTEMONTREAL.QC.CA)

Drogue : aide et référence  
au **1 800 265-2626** ou via

[WWW.DROGUE-AIDEREFFERENCE.QC.CA](http://WWW.DROGUE-AIDEREFFERENCE.QC.CA)

Canadian Red Cross

[WWW.REDCROSS.CA](http://WWW.REDCROSS.CA)

## COLLABORATORS

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