



# Health Alert:

## Overdoses Among Persons Unintentionally Exposed to Fentanyl While Using Cocaine

March 17, 2022

### **Situation:**

In the past 2 weeks, SFDPH has become aware of 3 fatal overdose decedents in San Francisco who intended to use only cocaine but were unintentionally exposed to fentanyl, as well as 9 similar non-fatal events in two groups of people.

Fentanyl is an opioid that can be 1.5 to 50 times more potent than heroin. In San Francisco, it is typically sold as a powder (white or lavender) and is not usually mixed with heroin, although it may appear similar to cocaine or other stimulants. Fentanyl overdoses have increased precipitously in San Francisco since 2015, with an estimated 474 deaths in 2021. Fentanyl overdose deaths usually involve cocaine and/or methamphetamine.

The similar appearance of fentanyl and stimulants may lead to unintentional use of fentanyl among people who use stimulants and have little or no tolerance to opioids. Anyone who accesses drugs outside of the regulated medical supply chain may be at risk of fentanyl overdose and may also be effective responders to a witnessed overdose.

### **Actions requested of SF clinicians:**

1. **Ensure that patients who access ANY non-prescribed drugs have naloxone and are aware of the risks of fentanyl.**
  - a. Either prescribe naloxone or direct people to the BHS pharmacy at 1380 Howard Street, or to [syringe access sites](#). Patients should be encouraged to keep the medication with them at all times.
2. Educate your patients who may be intermittent or regular users of stimulants that **drugs may contain fentanyl and there is a risk for opioid overdose.**
  - a. Educate patients on potential signs of overdose, including slowed breathing, skin turning blue/ashy, etc.
3. Advise patients who use drugs to:
  - a. Take steps to reduce risk, including avoiding the use of drugs



- b. For patients with substance use disorder, advise them that treatment for substance use disorder is effective. Medication and other forms of treatment are available through City treatment programs, primary care services, and other health providers
- c. Educate patients to take steps to reduce their risk, including use small “tester” doses, avoid using alone, avoid using drugs at same time as friends, avoid mixing drugs, avoid mixing drugs and alcohol
- d. Consider advising patients to use fentanyl test strips to identify fentanyl in a drug before use. Fentanyl test strips can identify the presence of fentanyl but are not 100% accurate so additional safety precautions are always recommended

### **Naloxone:**

Naloxone is available at no charge from several sources.

- People who use syringe access services can access naloxone from those sites.
- Any individual can get naloxone from the CBHS Pharmacy at 1380 Howard Street, 9:30am – 4pm weekdays (walk-in; no prescription required).
- Organizations seeking naloxone and training can contact the DPH Naloxone Clearinghouse Project at [DPH-Naloxone\\_Clearinghouse@sfdph.org](mailto:DPH-Naloxone_Clearinghouse@sfdph.org)
  - Email subject: “New Application – [Program Name]”
  - # of kits requested per quarter
  - Contact person name and email
  - Program details blurb
  - Example: “The goal of [Project X] is to increase naloxone utilization in San Francisco by training [Group Y] in [actions A, B, C].”
- Naloxone prescribing information (scroll down to Naloxone Prescribing, Education, and Awareness): <http://www.sfhealthnetwork.org/employee-physicians/pain-management-resources/>

### **Substance Use Disorder Treatment Referrals:**

*Medication for Addiction Treatment (MAT) for opioid use:*

- [Treatment Access Program](#) (TAP) @ 1380 Howard Street; Tel (415) 503-4730; 8am – 4:30pm weekdays
- BAART Market methadone clinic @ 1111 Market; Tel (415) 863-3833; drop in 6am - 11am for same day methadone
- BAART Turk methadone clinic @ 433 Turk; Tel (415) 863-3833; drop in 6am - 11am for same day methadone
- Bayview Hunters Point Foundation Methadone Maintenance @ 1625 Carroll Street; Tel (415) 822-8200; 6am – 2pm weekdays
- DSAAM OTOP (Ward 93) @ 1001 Potrero Avenue, building 90, Ward 93; Tel (415) 206-8412; drop in 6am – 9am



- Fort Help Bryant methadone clinic @ 915 Bryant Street; Tel (415) 777-9953; drop in 6:15am - 9am M/Th for same day methadone
- Fort Help Mission methadone clinic @ 1101 Capp Street; Tel (415) 821-1427; drop in 6:15am - 9am Tuesday/every other Friday for same day methadone
- Westside methadone maintenance clinic @ 1301 Pierce Street; Tel (415) 563-8200; 6:15 - 1:45 Monday-Friday

*Contingency management for stimulant use disorders:*

- SF AIDS Foundation PROP/PROP for All
  - PROP (contingency management for gay/bisexual men, MSM, trans women): Tel (415) 487-3115; 9am - 5pm
  - PROP 4 All (general contingency management): Tel (415) 487-3124; 9am - 5pm

**Fentanyl Test Strips:**

- Test strips are available at no charge from syringe access programs
- Any individual can get Test Strips 7 days a week from the CBHS Pharmacy at 1380 Howard Street, 9:00am – 6:30pm Mon-Fri and 9:00am – 4:00pm weekends (walk-in; no prescription required).
- Organizations requesting Fentanyl Test strips can contact CBHS to discuss obtaining their own supply of Fentanyl Test Strips by contacting [DPH-Naloxone\\_Clearinghouse@sfdph.org](mailto:DPH-Naloxone_Clearinghouse@sfdph.org)

**Poison Control Hotline:** 800-222-1222