Responding to Suspected Fentanyl or Other Opioids in Correctional Facilities: It's Safe to Assist

Precautions to stay safe if you suspect fentanyl or other opioids are present

The risk of overdose from touching or being near opioids, including fentanyl, is **extremely low**.

To make the risk even lower:

- Wear standard nitrile gloves for extra protection.
- If you come into contact with an unknown substance, brush or wash off the residue with soap and water.
- Do not use alcohol hand sanitizer. It will not remove the substance and may increase absorption.
- Do not perform actions that will cause substances to become airborne.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth after touching any surface that may be contaminated, even if wearing gloves.

To date there are **no clinically confirmed cases** of officers or other first responders overdosing from touching or simply being around fentanyl.

What does a fentanyl or other opioid overdose look like?

There are a number of videos that show officers on a scene "overdosing" from suspected fentanyl exposure.

The behaviors officers exhibit in these videos do not match signs of an opioid overdose.

Opioid overdose

- Unresponsive
- No/slow breathing
- Gurgling noise from mouth
- Blue or gray skin, lips, or nails
- Won't wake to stimuli like sternal rub

NOT opioid overdose

- Anxious
- Rapid breathing
- Increased heart rate
- Sweating and/or dizziness
- Can talk
- Can self-administer naloxone

Watch for clusters of fentanyl overdoses: one overdose may mean more fentanyl is in the facility and additional overdoses could happen.

Quick facts

- **You can't overdose by simply touching fentanyl** or drugs that contain fentanyl. Fentanyl does not absorb well through the skin, unless there are other chemicals present to help absorption.
- Prescription fentanyl patches, for example, combine fentanyl with a chemical that aids absorption, and it still takes hours of close contact with the patch to absorb fentanyl through the skin.
- Healthcare providers, laboratory personnel, and patients regularly handle fentanyl and do not overdose.
- Someone who has ingested, injected, or snorted the fentanyl does not exhale enough fentanyl to cause overdose in first responders.
- Second-hand exposure to fentanyl smoke is not a significant concern.

Endorsed by:

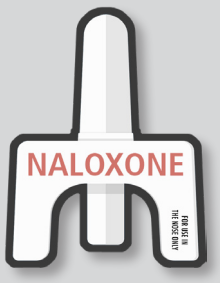
Department of Corrections
WASHINGTON STATE

What to do for a fentanyl or other opioid overdose

The response for fentanyl overdose is the same as other opioids. **Follow your facility's protocol** for opioid overdose response, including calling medical immediately.

1. Check for responsiveness: gently shake, do a sternal rub.
2. Give 1 dose of naloxone (also known as Narcan®). Naloxone takes a few minutes to take effect, so don't expect an immediate response.
3. Start chest compressions if there is no heartbeat. Support their breathing if they are not breathing or not breathing well. Opioids affect a person's ability to breathe —helping them breathe is important.
4. If they do not start breathing on their own in 2-3 minutes, give an additional dose of naloxone.
5. Continue chest compressions and/or breathing support until medical backup arrives or they start breathing on their own.
6. If they are breathing and you have to leave them alone, roll them into the recovery position.
7. When they wake up, tell them what has happened. They may feel anxious or unwell. Let them know the effects of naloxone will wear off in 30-90 minutes. Stay with them until medical arrives.

Naloxone works on fentanyl and other opioids.



- It may take more than one dose to reverse an overdose.
- **Don't give several doses at the same time**. Naloxone takes a few minutes to take effect. If they do not start breathing on their own in 2-3 minutes, give an additional dose of naloxone.

Unnecessary PPE preparation can delay life-saving treatment.

- Wear standard nitrile gloves for extra protection.
- Wear an N95 or P100 respirator if there is visible powder in the air.
- Wipe any visible powder residue off lips prior to rescue breathing. Use a CPR mask, shield, or bag-valve mask, if available.

Learn more

If you have concerns about a potential drug exposure or poisoning, call your local **Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.**

If you are interested in WA statewide trends and other fentanyl facts, visit: stopoverdose.org/basics/fentanyl

Developed by the UW Addictions, Drug & Alcohol Institute

ADAI ADDICTIONS, DRUG & ALCOHOL INSTITUTE | W

Thank you to our development partners:
Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (NW HIDTA); Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission; Washington Poison Center; Washington State Department of Health; Washington State Health Care Authority