

Fentanyl

A barrage of recent news, headlined by the death of Prince, highlights the dangers of opioid-based painkillers and fentanyl in particular. Although prescription fentanyl is not new, versions of the drug are being created and sold outside the controls of normal pharmaceutical production and distribution, resulting in uncontrolled manufacturing, low cost, high availability, and extreme dosages of the drug. Unlike many illicit drugs, the **fentanyl being found on the streets is lethal** and can affect officers who do nothing more than handle the sample during a routine stop.

Fentanyl is approximately 80 to 100 times more potent than morphine and roughly 40 to 50 times more potent than pharmaceutical grade (100% pure) heroin.¹

The National Forensic Science Technology Center (NFSTC) believes **widespread general precautions should be taken by all officers, evidence personnel and laboratory analysts** who are at risk simply by their exposure to unknown powders and liquids.

Recommended General Precautions:

Fentanyl is manufactured in pill, powder, liquid and patch formats. Fentanyl has been found in heroin and other drugs, so its presence cannot be excluded just because it is not in a traditional form.

Law Enforcement Officers, First Responders and Evidence Personnel: Proper Personal Protection Equipment (PPE): Minimum PPE is advised for ALL DRUG-RELATED ENCOUNTERS includes gloves, mask and eye protection.

Processes and Protocol

Due to the **extreme toxicity** of this substance in all forms, NFSTC recommends every agency conduct an immediate review of unknown powder and drug collection protocols and evidence processing.

1. **Do NOT open** samples or containers that appear to be drugs without PPE. (Don't know? Don't open!)
2. **Do not perform** any field-testing without PPE and, if possible, in a fume hood.
3. **Communicate** with other first responders and emergency personnel when unknown or suspect material is present.

NFSTC believes it is imperative for personnel at every point in this process be properly trained and knowledgeable about the policies and protocols of their agency, and adhere to them.

¹ http://www.cdc.gov/NIOSH/ershdb/EmergencyResponseCard_29750022.html

Resources:

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Notice:

Fentanyl: incapacitating Agent:

http://www.cdc.gov/NIOSH/ershdb/EmergencyResponseCard_29750022.html

DEA Warning: Fentanyl Exposure Kills

Official DEA Fentanyl Alert: <https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2015/hq031815.shtml>

The DEA has released a **Roll Call video to all law enforcement nationwide** about the dangers of improperly handling fentanyl and its deadly consequences.

<https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2016/hq061016.shtml>

Fentanyl in the News:

Mexican Cartels Producing More Fentanyl.

The [New York Times](#) reports that US law enforcement and border authorities “warn that Mexican cartels are using their own labs to produce” the drug fentanyl and distribute it “through their vast smuggling networks to meet rising American demand for opiates and pharmaceuticals.” Acting Deputy Administrator of the DEA Jack Riley said, “It is really the next migration of the cartels in terms of making profit. This goes to the heart of the marketing genius of the cartels. They saw this coming.”

Fentanyl: The powerful opioid that killed Prince

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/05/10/health/fentanyl-new-heroin-deadlier/index.html>

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