



# Fentanyl Facts for Schools

## A Big Danger in Small Amounts

### What is fentanyl and how does it work in the body?

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid, similar to morphine but 50 to 100 times more potent. In its prescription form it is prescribed for pain, but fentanyl is also made illegally and distributed as a street drug. Illegal fentanyl is sold as a powder or made into pills that look like real prescription opioids (pain relievers).

Fentanyl works by binding to the body's opioid receptors, which are found in areas of the brain that control pain and emotions. Its effects include euphoria, drowsiness, nausea, confusion, constipation, sedation, tolerance, addiction, respiratory depression and arrest, unconsciousness, coma, and death.



### Why is fentanyl a problem in Arizona?

Fentanyl is the most common substance found in opioid overdose deaths in Arizona – Teens as young as 14 years old have overdosed and died.

Illegal fentanyl is being mixed with other drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine. This is especially dangerous because people are often unaware that fentanyl has been added. The high potency of fentanyl greatly increases risk of overdose, especially if a person who uses drugs is unaware that a powder or pill contains it. Naloxone is a medicine that can be given to a person to reverse a fentanyl overdose. Multiple naloxone doses might be necessary because of fentanyl's potency.



### What Can Schools Do?

**School Nurse** | Have the overdose reversal drug naloxone on hand. Schools are responsible for anticipating and preparing to respond to a variety of emergencies. The school nurse is often the first health professional who responds to an emergency in the school setting. The school nurse possesses the education and knowledge to identify emergent situations, manage the emergency until relieved by emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, communicate the assessment and interventions to EMS personnel, and follow up with the healthcare provider.

A school nurses' access to naloxone as part of their school's emergency preparedness will improve opioid overdose response, response preparation, and avoid horrific outcomes such as death. With naloxone as part of an emergency protocol, a school nurse can quickly administer it to prevent overdose deaths by reversing life-threatening respiratory depression. (National Association of School Nurses Position Statement, June 2020) The National Association of School Nurses offers a no cost toolkit for school nurses. (Naloxone in Schools Toolkit).

**Administration** | Educate, communicate and prepare. Schedule an educational event (online or in person) for parents to learn about counterfeit pills and fentanyl. Share Fentanyl Facts for

Families through e-mail, the school website or Parent Teacher organizations. Establish safety protocols if pills or powders are found on campus, they may contain fentanyl.

**Counselors** | Counselors can be essential in working with parents to help suggest substance use treatment options for those struggling with a substance use disorder. Counselors can share the Opioid Assistance and Referral Line with parents to help guide them to treatment and recovery information. **The Opioid Assistance and Referral Line number is free and confidential. The number is 1-888-688-4222.** If the child is misusing opioids, counselors may want to bring in the school nurse to discuss the overdose reversal drug naloxone.

Treatment works and there is hope. Medication along with behavioral therapies have been shown to be effective in treating those with an addiction to fentanyl and other opioids.



**Substance Abuse  
Coalition Leaders  
of Arizona**

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