

Fentanyl

FACT SHEET

Fentanyl is 100 times more potent than morphine, 750 times stronger than codeine.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2011/10/25/brosnahan-fentanyl.html>

From 1998 to 2005, Health Canada received 4 reports of abuse of fentanyl patches by adolescent boys aged 14-17. Three of them died.

<http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/pdf/s7918e/s7918e.pdf>

Recent overdoses are due to the mixture of or substitution for heroin or cocaine in private labs
<http://drugabuse.gov/drugpages/fentanyl.html>



What is fentanyl?

Similar to morphine, fentanyl is a synthetic opiate used to treat patients with extreme chronic pain. Sometimes it is used for patients coming out of surgery. Street names for fentanyl include TNT, China girl, Goodfella, Murder 8, and Tango and Cash (<http://drugabuse.gov/drugpages/fentanyl.html>). Fentanyl is usually used when no other pain medicines work as it is extremely addictive and more powerful than other medicines such as morphine. Cancer patients who already take opioids for pain relievers may be prescribed fentanyl to help further decrease pain. Alarmingly, fentanyl is increasingly appearing as a street-drug where it is being misused for illicit purposes.

What are the different types of fentanyl?

The prescription form of fentanyl, also known as Actiq, Sublimaze, and Duragesic, comes in lozenges, patches, injections, dissolving films, and pills. Duragesic is a patch applied to the skin like a Band-Aid and is used for pain management. It provides long-lasting relief for those who suffer from persistent pain (www.duragesic.com). Actiq is the solid form of fentanyl that is usually a lollipop that dissolves slowly. This form of fentanyl is primarily used for opioid addicts and cancer patients. Sublimaze is the injection of fentanyl given by health care providers, usually used in surgeries and procedures. More recently, a powder form of fentanyl is becoming more popular on the street, where it is used as a mixture with either heroin or cocaine, or sometimes even as a substitution for heroin.

What are the effects of fentanyl?

Like other opiates (pain relievers), fentanyl binds to the body's receptors that control pain and emotions, which drives up dopamine levels and produces enhanced states of euphoria and relaxation (<http://drugabuse.gov/drugpages/fentanyl.html>).

Negative side effects of fentanyl can include mood changes, dysphoria (feelings of anxiety, restlessness, or dissatisfaction), or drowsiness. Individuals can also have difficulty breathing and/or urinating and can feel disoriented. Drug dependency is common among users so patients should ensure that they use fentanyl exactly how the physician prescribed.

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As of October 2011, there have been at least 3 deaths and dozens of overdoses due to fentanyl (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2011/10/25/brosnahan-fentanyl.html>)

Fentanyl is one of nine narcotics listed by the FDA as responsible for the most emergency room treatments for drug overdoses

1,013 deaths from fentanyl were reported in the USA from April 2005-March 2007. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)(http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-07-24-fentanyl_N.htm)

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If fentanyl is potentially harmful, why do people misuse it?

Despite the potential negative side effects, fentanyl is becoming more popular as a drug for misuse and abuse. Because it is so much more powerful, potent, and cheap than other illegal/misused drugs, such as morphine, codeine, and heroin, there is a greater chance of overdose. Street users are reportedly extracting fentanyl, heating it up, and injecting it directly into their veins, which produces a quicker and more potent high that is quickly followed by a low. This is dangerous because users are unable to gauge the dose of fentanyl their bodies are ingesting, which can lead to an overdose (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2011/10/25/brosnahan-fentanyl.html>). In other cases, individuals think they are ingesting heroin and are unaware that it is actually fentanyl. These individuals may use more of the drug than intended; given the potency of fentanyl, this can cause serious health problems.

What do I do if somebody I know is misusing fentanyl?

Individuals who are misusing fentanyl can become easily dependent on the drug. Seek help from a physician immediately if you or someone you know is dependent on fentanyl. Overdoses are a risk and, if they occur, you should contact 911 immediately. Signs of overdoses include slow breathing, pinpoint pupils, cold and clammy skin, and a slow heartbeat.

Resources

- National Institute on Drug Abuse
<http://drugabuse.gov/drugpages/fentanyl.html>
- Drug Abuse Help – Fentanyl Abuse, Addiction and Treatment
<http://www.drugabusehelp.com/drugs/fentanyl/>
- CBC News – Fentanyl pain patch a dangerous street drug
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2011/10/25/brosnahan-fentanyl.html>