SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

The abuse of drugs containing fentanyl is killing Americans. Misinformation and inconsistent recommendations regarding fentanyl have resulted in confusion in the first responder community.

You as a first responder (law enforcement, fire, rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel) are increasingly likely to encounter fentanyl in your daily activities (e.g., responding to overdose calls, conducting traffic stops, arrests, and searches).

This document provides scientific, evidence-based recommendations to protect yourself from exposure.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Fentanyl can be present in a variety of forms (e.g., powder, tablets, capsules, solutions, and rocks).
- Inhalation of airborne powder is MOST LIKELY to lead to harmful effects, but is less likely to occur than skin contact.
- Incidental skin contact may occur during daily activities but is not expected to lead to harmful effects if the contaminated skin is promptly washed off with water.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is effective in protecting you from exposure.
- Slow breathing or no breathing, drowsiness or unresponsiveness, and constricted or pinpoint pupils are the specific signs consistent with fentanyl intoxication.
- Naloxone is an effective medication that rapidly reverses the effects of fentanyl.

To protect yourself from exposure

- Wear gloves when the presence of fentanyl is suspected.
- AVOID actions that may cause powder to become airborne.
- Use a properly-fitted, NIOSH-approved respirator (“mask”), eye protection, and minimize skin contact when responding to a situation where small amounts of suspected fentanyl are visible and may become airborne.
- Follow your department guidelines if the scene involves large amounts of suspected fentanyl (e.g., distribution/storage facility, pill milling operation, clandestine lab, gross contamination, spill or release).

When exposure occurs

- Prevent further contamination and notify other first responders and dispatch.
- Do not touch your eyes, mouth, nose or any skin after touching any potentially contaminated surface.
- Wash skin thoroughly with cool water, and soap if available. Do NOT use hand sanitizers as they may enhance absorption.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after the incident and before eating, drinking, smoking, or using the restroom.
- If you suspect your clothing, shoes, and PPE may be contaminated, follow your department guidelines for decontamination.

If you or other first responders exhibit

- Slow Breathing or No Breathing
- Drowsiness or Unresponsiveness
- Constricted or Pinpoint Pupils

- Move away from the source of exposure and call EMS.
- Administer naloxone according to your department protocols. Multiple doses may be required.
- If naloxone is not available, rescue breathing can be a lifesaving measure until EMS arrives. Use standard basic life support safety precautions (e.g., pocket mask, gloves) to address the exposure risk.
- If needed, initiate CPR until EMS arrives.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/key-issues/fentanyl