

The New Drug Crisis: Addressing Fentanyl on College Campuses



Introduction

More than 150 people die every day from overdoses related to synthetic opioids, with substances like fentanyl contributing to what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention call “the newest drug crisis in the United States.” Fentanyl is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine, with a lethal dose as low as two milligrams—comparable to 10-15 grains of table salt.

Drug traffickers are increasingly mixing this highly addictive synthetic opioid in recreational drugs and counterfeit pills to ensure repeat buyers. Because of its potency, just one fentanyl-laced pill can be deadly.



The Facts About Fentanyl

What is Fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. It is a major contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses in the United States.

Are There Different Types of Fentanyl?

There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illicitly manufactured fentanyl. Both are considered synthetic opioids.

Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain, especially after surgery and for advanced-stage cancer.

Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is available in different forms, including liquid and powder. Powdered fentanyl is commonly mixed with drugs like heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine and made into pills that resemble other prescription opioids. Liquid fentanyl can be found in nasal sprays, and eye drops, or dropped onto paper or small candies. Street names for illicitly manufactured fentanyl include Apache, Dance Fever, Friend, Goodfellas, Jackpot, Murder 8, and Tango & Cash.



Symptoms of Overdose and/or Poisoning

- Small, constricted “pinpoint” pupils
- Falling asleep or losing consciousness
- Slow, weak, or no breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds
- Limp body
- Cold and/or clammy skin
- Discolored skin (especially in lips and nails)

Fentanyl on College Campuses

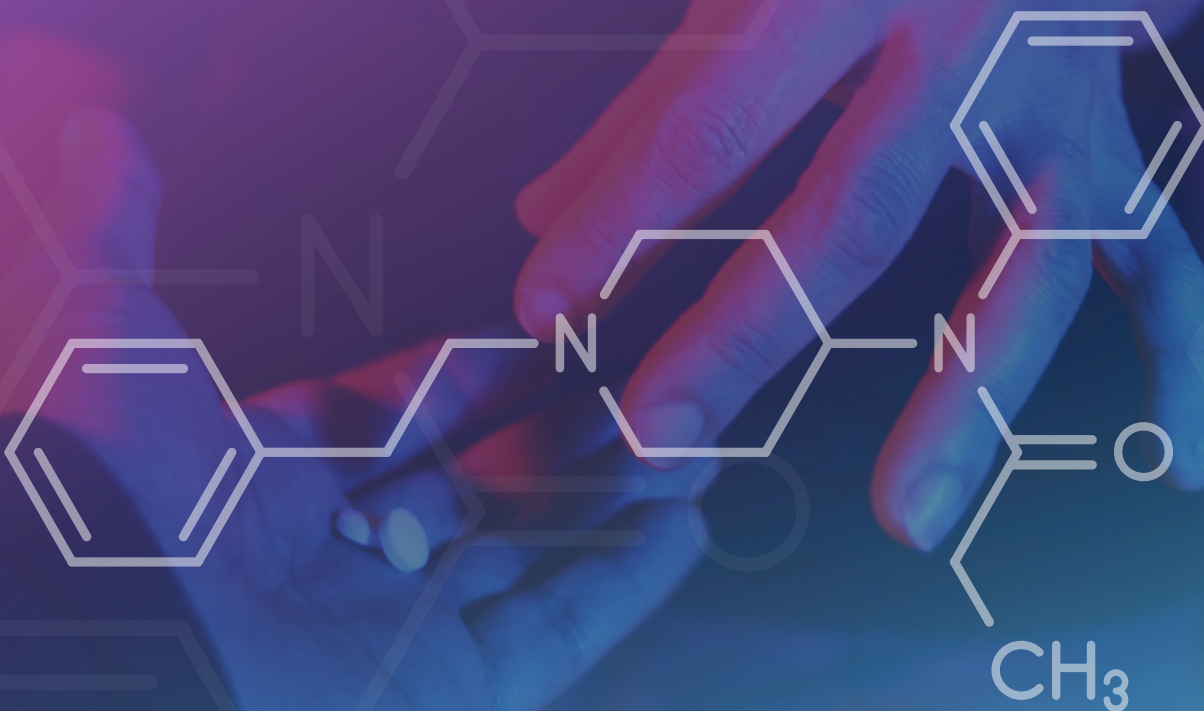
Fentanyl misuse is now the No. 1 cause of death for Americans ages 18 to 45, and it poses a specific threat on college campuses. About a third of college students misuse prescription drugs like Adderall and Ritalin; because fentanyl is often made to look like prescription drugs, obtaining these drugs illegally significantly increases the risk of death by fentanyl poisoning.

Many institutions now post information about fentanyl on their websites to heighten awareness of the risks, and some colleges keep naloxone (also known as Narcan) on hand to treat overdoses and/or poisonings .

Similar to campus efforts to address other substances, a solid program confronting the specific threat of fentanyl requires coordinated prevention, intervention, and response.

Fentanyl Poisoning

Solutions historically applied to opioid overdose do not always apply when addressing fentanyl and fake pills. Fentanyl-related deaths are referred to as both “poisonings” and/or “overdoses”. An overdose occurs when a person ingests too much of a known substance, resulting in either illness or death. Fentanyl-laced pill (fentapill) deaths are typically the result of ingesting a pill believing it is a legitimate medication such as oxycodone or Advan. The deception makes such a death more accurately classified as poisoning.



Responding to Possible Overdose or Poisoning

Institutions should adopt a three-step action plan to help students, faculty, and staff respond if they suspect someone has overdosed on any substance. Such a plan should include information on how to obtain - either on campus or in the community - and administer Narcan if someone suspects an opioid overdose, to include fentanyl poisoning.

1.

Ask Questions

Before doing anything, ask the person: “Are you OK?” “Have you been drinking or taking anything?” “What drugs have you taken?” Look around for drugs or drug paraphernalia, but do not come into contact with it.

2.

Look for Symptoms

While asking questions, watch for possible overdose symptoms, such as vomiting, seizures, loss of consciousness, bluish skin color, paleness, or hypothermia.

3.

Take Action

- Call 911.
- Lay the person on their side. Place their hands under their head and their upper knee forward to prevent them from rolling onto their stomach. Do not lay them on their back or stomach.
- Keep them alert if you can. Talk to them loudly. Shout their name if you know it.
- Try to wake them, if they have passed out. Shake their shoulders or rub your knuckles back and forth firmly in the middle of their chest.
- When first responders arrive, tell them about any symptoms you have observed and (if you know) what drugs the person took.

Prevention

Many efforts and funding sources to address the fentanyl crisis center around the use of Narcan. In addition, it's important to remember that proactive steps to keep people from using or misusing substances in the first place is the first step in preventing overdose and poisoning.



Provide Courses on Drug Prevention

Drug prevention courses—either universal or fentanyl-specific—give students insights into the types of illicit drugs and prescription pills available, their effects and associated risks. This should include reinforcement of safe and legal use of medications prescribed by a physician. Online courses are a good way to reach students whether on campus or remote.



Train Fentanyl Awareness Influencers

Train students in leadership positions or who are strong peer influencers to become advocates for fentanyl education and awareness. Arm them with information and prevention strategies to share with their classmates. This type of peer-to-peer learning has been shown to have an impact.



Educate Students About the Laws

According to the [Government Accountability Office](#), 47 states have enacted both Good Samaritan and naloxone access laws. Good Samaritan laws protect individuals who call for medical assistance for someone experiencing an overdose, while naloxone access laws protect individuals who administer Narcan. Some states are even legalizing the use of fentanyl testing strips, although these are considered drug paraphernalia in many states.



Partner with Local Experts

Colleges can tap their own instructors, as well as community and state health departments, drug awareness organizations, health organizations, and other groups in the college community to provide resources and content to support their drug awareness programs. You can access a list of state authorities (SSAs) who oversee funding for substance abuse programs in your state at: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/ssadirectory.pdf>.



Due to a recent rise in the use of “tranq dope” - a mix of opioids and the addictive sedative xylazine –students, faculty and staff should be alerted that this deadly combination does not respond to Narcan. Narcan will reverse the effects of opioids, but not the sedative effects of xylazine. If someone believes a person in distress has used this combination, it is even more critical that they inform first responders immediately. Certain members of the campus community will be especially vulnerable, including the unhoused, those with mental health challenges and those in recovery for or, struggling with a substance use disorder.



Resources



ACT 2 Save a Life, a health education and health behavior change program
<https://www.ocfl.net/FamiliesHealthSocialSvcs/Act2SaveALife.aspx>



One Pill Can Kill' public awareness website about the dangers of fake pills.
<https://www.dea.gov/onepill>

DEA fentanyl awareness website: <https://www.dea.gov/fentanylawareness>



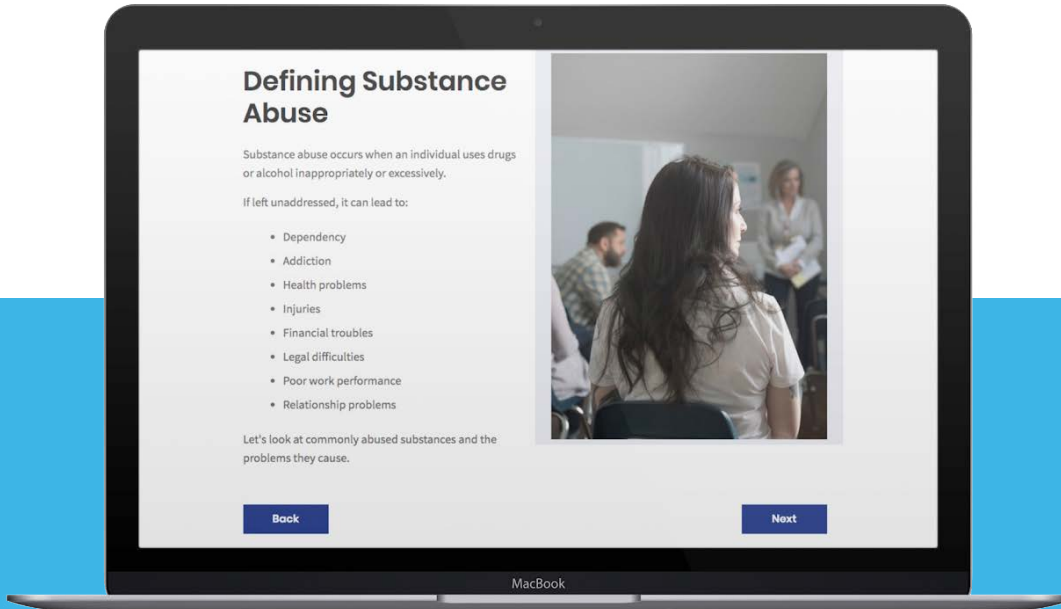
Fentanyl Awareness Day resources: <https://www.fentanylawarenessday.org/>



CDC Fentanyl Facts website: <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html>

How Vector Solutions Can Help

Vector Solutions has been the trusted standard in campus prevention programming for more than 20 years. Our courses increase knowledge, encourage better decision-making, and comply with federal and state legislation. We offer powerful course features and rich data insights to elevate your safety and prevention programs.



The following online courses can help students make legal, healthy, informed decisions about prescription medication, including what is considered misuse and how to intervene in a potentially life-threatening situation. Pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys provide data to inform and assess your prevention strategies. Administrators can add custom content on fentanyl risks and institutional resources to any of the following courses:



Prescription Drug Misuse:
Prevention



Prescription Drug Misuse:
Opioids



Prescription Drug Misuse:
Stimulants

About Vector Solutions

Vector Solutions is the industry leader in high-impact training and solutions that meet the evolving needs of higher education. We deliver online safety and prevention education, data analytics, and research insights to more than 2,000 colleges, universities, and national Greek-letter organizations, serving more than 10 million learners annually. We are committed to helping our customers drive impact through effective, innovative programming for faculty, staff, and students.

References

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<https://www.campusdrugprevention.gov/>

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