

Fentanyl Test Strips to Prevent Drug Overdose

Portions of this fact sheet are adapted from the California Department of Public Health's '[Fentanyl Testing to Prevent Overdose](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Fact_Sheet_Fentanyl_Testing_Approved_ADA.pdf#search=fentanyl%20test%20strips) (https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Fact_Sheet_Fentanyl_Testing_Approved_ADA.pdf#search=fentanyl%20test%20strips)' fact sheet.

What are fentanyl test strips?

Fentanyl test strips (FTS) are a form of drug testing technology which have shown to be effective at detecting the presence of fentanyl in drug samples prior to use. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is used medically to treat severe pain, and illicitly manufactured fentanyl is driving an increase in drug overdose deaths both nationally and in Minnesota. In Minnesota, overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids, including fentanyl and fentanyl analogues, increased 81% (298 to 539 deaths) from 2019 to 2020. As of July 2021, FTS are no longer within the definition of “drug paraphernalia” in Minnesota and are thus legal to possess, carry, and distribute. Learn more here: [Minnesota Statute 152.01, Subd. 18 \(b\)](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/152.01) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/152.01>)

Public health benefits of fentanyl test strips

FTS are a reliable, common-sense means of providing people at risk of fentanyl exposure with more information that can help decrease risk of overdose. Because FTS access is new, scientific evidence is only just beginning to emerge. An evaluation of FTS use in San Francisco found they promote increased fentanyl awareness and lead people to take safety precautions to prevent overdose if fentanyl is detected. A study involving a community-based FTS distribution program in North Carolina found that 81% of those with access to FTS routinely tested their drugs before use.

Those with a positive test result were five times more likely to change their drug use behavior to reduce the risk of overdose. In a Rhode Island study of young adults who reported using heroin, cocaine, or illicitly obtained prescription pills, “receiving a positive [fentanyl] result was significantly associated with reporting a positive change in overdose risk behavior.”

How to use fentanyl test strips

In order to use fentanyl test strips:

1. Dissolve a small amount of drug supply in water, and then dip the test strip into the liquid for 15 seconds. Because the test strips are highly sensitive, a minimal amount of drug residue is sufficient to obtain a result.
2. Set the test strip on a flat surface until results appear, typically within 5 minutes.
3. One line indicates fentanyl is present in the sample; two lines indicate a negative result.

Scan this QR code to watch a video on how to use fentanyl test strips:



A 2018 study jointly conducted by researchers at Brown University, Boston

Medical Center, and Johns Hopkins University in collaboration with law enforcement agencies sought to validate the efficacy of FTS for use in detecting fentanyl in drug samples. The study found that the test strips were accurate at detecting fentanyl when it was present in samples of street drugs provided by law enforcement, and unlikely to produce false negative results.

FTS have some known limitations. They do not measure the quantity or potency of fentanyl present in a drug sample. There is also emerging evidence that FTS may be cross-reactive with methamphetamine and that when methamphetamine drug samples are tested for fentanyl contamination, the sample should be diluted in a greater amount of water (about half a cup) to produce accurate results.

Accessing fentanyl test strips in Minnesota

FTS are now legal to possess, carry, and distribute in Minnesota and are an important tool to prevent drug overdose. To learn more about FTS and where you can access them for free in Minnesota, please contact the MDH Drug Overdose Prevention Unit by email at health.drugodprev@state.mn.us.

More drug overdose prevention strategies

For people who use drugs, FTS should be considered one 'tool' in the 'toolbox' of effective drug overdose prevention strategies. Remember to also:

- Connect with your local Syringe Services Program
- Carry naloxone

- Teach those around you to use & carry naloxone
- Do not use alone
- Have a safety plan for every time you use

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To obtain this information in a different format, email: health.drugodprev@state.mn.us