

Fentanyl Examined

By Jim Rachels



Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that in recent years has become popular and deadly. It was first created in Belgium in 1960. It was originally manufactured to assist in pain management of people who were experiencing severe chronic pain such as cancer patients. Fentanyl is particularly dangerous because it is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. It can take as little as a few granules the size of salt to kill someone.

Fentanyl addiction has rapidly spread across the United States. It has changed the landscape of the addiction problem in America. It started off being sold to users who knew exactly what they were getting. Now it has evolved to the point where dealers are adding Fentanyl to almost every other drug. Illegal fentanyl is being sold in a number of ways - as a powder, dissolvable film strips, nasal sprays, and even in eye droppers. No matter how it is taken, this is an extremely dangerous drug and users need to be careful about where and from whom they obtain their drugs.

When Fentanyl is dispensed it is known under the brand names Actiq®, Duragesic®, and Sublimaze. This drug was designed to help people who are having surgery, those who have a terminal illness that involves intense pain and some who are long-term opiate users that have built up a tolerance to the other drugs that they have been using.

So how is Fentanyl typically distributed?

It is prescribed as a shot, as a patch on the person's skin or as lozenges that are sucked. These are the typical ways the drug is administered legally. When it comes to illegal consumption it is often snorted, injected, or smoked. These are the fastest ways to get the drug into their systems.

Fentanyl is inexpensive and easy to manufacture in large quantities. The drug cartels no longer have to worry about getting the opium plant, the sun, water, and places to grow it. Everything is now done in a lab. The cartels have turned this into one of their biggest money-makers. As of right now, America is losing its war on drugs.

Fentanyl addiction can happen to anyone. It could be a father, a soccer mom, a high school student, an immigrant, or a corporate CEO. You could be rich or poor. Addiction does not discriminate. It is destroying the lives of people of all different backgrounds.

Fentanyl is one of the strongest opioids around. Much of it has been coming from China but it is also starting to be made by the cartels in Mexico, mostly in Sinaloa. It is made in laboratories with no quality control to make sure the product is not contaminated. Many times these are extremely unclean conditions in which the chemists are working. So you

simply can't know what you're getting and whether or not it is contaminated.

Fentanyl is an opioid similar to morphine but up to 100 times stronger and 50 times stronger than heroin. It does have medical uses but the products addicts are getting on the streets are not medical-grade and can be very dangerous. An amount as small as two grains of salt can be deadly. People are dying at an incredible rate.

It is said that opioids kill more than 100 people every single day. And the numbers have been climbing every year. It appears the problem is continuing to worsen, with no end in sight. Fentanyl has been found in crack, cocaine, marijuana, and even in the pills that are being pressed in Mexico. Cartels are pressing their own pills to look like legitimate prescription pills. Many of these are filled with Fentanyl, not just the OxyContin and Percocet the user thinks they're getting. A common pill that will contain Fentanyl is the M30 pill. These have a stamp on one side that says M30. These were originally released as Oxycontin. But over the years the cartels have been slowly adding more and more Fentanyl to the pills and some are even 100% Fentanyl.

Death rates were already climbing steadily and then came COVID. This made the death rate even worse than it already was. According to the CDC between May 2020 and April 2021, 100,300 deaths were reported and most of them from Fentanyl. This was a 28% increase from the year before. Lockdowns have left people socially isolated and this led to a rise in drug use and in turn an increase in the death rate. This also contributed to people not being able to find the proper care. Many treatment places closed their doors leaving addicts to fend for themselves, rehabs weren't taking new clients and all the local meetings had closed for the time being. There was no help to be found for the people who were actually seeking it.

Drug overdoses now kill more people than car accidents and gun violence combined. These are some eye-opening numbers, yet most people are uninformed, leaving them blind to this epidemic.

Many of the places that have been hardest hit by the epidemic are the communities where the majority lack decent health insurance. This limits the amount of help that people have available to them. Those who really want and need help, can't afford the price of detox and rehab. This leaves them to remain addicted and confined to the life they have been living.

So many people stay addicted to this because of the symptoms the withdrawals put them through. Many people are simply dopesick. The withdrawal symptoms can be diarrhea, nausea, body aches, anxiety, and depression. Those are just some of the symptoms, not all. These things are

all the contributing factors to being dopesick. And while you are dopesick it feels like there is no end in sight.

Many addicts know the dire consequences of just one bad batch but yet they are unable to stop. Many want to but simply can't. They are willing to risk their lives for their next high. That next high is all that matters in the mind of an addict.

There are some tools available. One of the biggest tools being used to fight this epidemic is Medical Assisted Treatment. These include using medications like Methadone and Suboxone. These are drugs that are used to keep the withdrawals at bay and reduce the cravings to use. They have been shown to be quite effective in helping lower drug use. This falls into the category of harm reduction. It has helped people get their lives back, obtain employment and reunite with family. This is still something controversial but I think everyone should educate themselves about these methods and look at the statistics and base them on that. Opinions only go so far but the numbers don't lie and this has been shown to help.

Another thing that has saved countless lives from overdoses is Naloxone also known as Narcan. This is a tool that reverses the overdose and starts the person breathing. In some places, it is readily available and you can get it at pharmacies. This is something that every addict should have on them if they are using opiates. I think that some kind of Narcan program put into place would save many lives. No matter what these people are going to use we should at least look out for their safety when they're too sick to look after their own.

So how do we try to help this situation? There are a few things that could really help this epidemic. I think first and foremost is education. These people need to truly understand what they are taking and the extremely high risk that goes along with it. Education I think is truly the first line of defense we have to battle this problem. We have to get to the children and teach them about substance abuse before the problem ever starts.

Law enforcement has been targeting drugmakers and drug dealers. They are putting a lot of pressure on these criminals. Some states have gone as far as having "Death by distribution" laws. This means that the individual that sold someone drugs that resulted in death can now be charged with murder. I think this is something that more states should implement. After all, if you're a dealer you are the one giving someone a dangerous product that you know can kill them and all you are concerned about is money then you should be punished to the full extent of the law. I think that is a tool that can be used to help reduce unnecessary deaths. There are too many dealers that just don't care that they're killing a lot of people with the stuff they sell.

I believe that with the proper education and resources put in place, we can help fight this epidemic more effectively. We just need to increase awareness. Also, for the people that are involved, we need to get everyone on the same page. We need to all come together to come up with an effective strategy to help these people in need. Whether it be an abstinence-based approach or through harm reduction efforts. We need to all work together to come up with plans that work with people on an individual basis. Not all people are the same. This means that no two recoveries are identical.