

MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Health Departments, emergency rooms and hospitals, EMS providers, pharmacies, harm reduction organizations, schools

FROM: IDPH Office of Health Promotion

DATE: August 31, 2022

SUBJECT: Colored Fentanyl

- A colorful version of Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, has been introduced to the illicit drug market and is being referred to as “colored” or “rainbow” fentanyl. Colored fentanyl is showing up in the form of pills closely resembling candy and colorful chalk (image below).
- The rainbow-colored fentanyl pills have been identified in multiple states including CA, OR, WA, ID, AZ, NC, WV, Washington DC, and most recently, St. Louis, MO.
- Significant concern of accidental ingestion by young children due to the rainbow colors and candy-like appearance (image below).
- Children are more susceptible to an overdose due to their smaller size, weight, and lack of tolerance of regular opioid users. The lethal dose of fentanyl for a child is smaller than the lethal dose for an adult.
- Adults are encouraged to talk to children and teens about the dangers of ingesting unknown substances
- If taking illicit substances, there are precautions that can be used to reduce risk for fatal and non-fatal overdose.
  - Consider testing the substance for fentanyl using fentanyl test strips
  - Carry naloxone and have a person who is able to administer naloxone available to assist
  - Be aware that more than one dose of naloxone may be required to reverse an overdose, especially when synthetic opioids are involved.
  - Keep all substances out of the reach of children



Rainbow-colored fentanyl pills seized by US Customs and Border Protection

**Action Items:**

**Local health departments are encouraged to share this alert with community partners:**

- Share this information with harm reduction sites, treatment facilities, clinical providers, pharmacies, and schools in your area.
- Encourage wide distribution and use of naloxone and fentanyl test strips.
- Educate the public that overdose spikes are occurring and can be prevented.
- Contact IDPH for assistance if needed
- Please note an upcoming webinar about fentanyl communications by Rescue:  
<https://info.rescueagency.com/en-us/fentanyl-communications-webinar>

**First responders and medical providers:**

- If evidence of exposure to colored fentanyl, please notify Illinois Poison Center 1-800-222-1222
- Naloxone (opioid reversal agent) should be used per protocol when opioid overdose is suspected, with awareness that more and prolonged administrations may be required to fully reverse an overdose.
- As with any suspected opioid overdose, special attention should be paid to the airway with a low threshold for airway support.
- First responders should practice standard safety precautions, including barrier protection from contact with skin lesions.
- Consider possible opioid poisoning if a child presents with potential symptoms: blue or purple fingernails and lips, unresponsiveness to voice or touch, pinpoint-sized pupils, slow heartbeat or blood pressure, pale and clammy skin, and slow, irregular or stopped breathing.

**Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction:**

- Encourage clients and their family and friends to carry naloxone.
- Encourage clients and their family and friends to ensure substances are kept out of the reach of children.
- Encourage clients to use fentanyl test strips before consumption and avoid using drugs alone.

- Inform clients who report any type of illicit drug use that any drug can contain fentanyl.
- Ensure any drug injection site or rash wound care is provided using gloves and rashes (especially among sexually active persons) are further evaluated by medical professionals.
- Have information on Medication Assisted Recovery (MAR) and treatment programs available.
- Please note an upcoming webinar about fentanyl communications by Rescue:  
<https://info.rescueagency.com/en-us/fentanyl-communications-webinar>

**Additional Resources:**

- Illinois Helpline for Opioid and Other Substances
  - [Helplineil.org](http://helplineil.org)
  - Call (833) 234-6343
  - Text “HELP” to 833234
  - Services available en Español
- Illinois Poison Center:
  - 1-800-222-1222
  - <https://www.illinoispoisoncenter.org/>
- Local Health Department listings: <http://www.idph.state.il.us/LHDMAP/HealthRegions.aspx>
- Instructional videos on naloxone administration: <https://prescribetoprevent.org/patient-education/videos-for-download/>
- Instructions for use of fentanyl test strips: <https://anypositivechange.org/fentanyl-test-strip-instruction-sheet/>
- IDPH opioid webpage: <https://dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/opioids.html>
- DEA One Pill Can Kill Informational Page: <https://www.dea.gov/onepill>
- CSTE Overdose Cluster Toolkit: <https://odalerts.cste.org/>
- A Dose of Truth: <https://www.prevention.org/a-dose-of-truth/>
- Rethink Recovery IL: <https://rethinkrecoveryil.com/>