

Opioid Protective Guidance for Lay Person Responders

SITUATION

As the opioid crisis continues, many community members are receiving training on how to respond to an overdose emergency. Many potent opioids can be harmful if ingested or handled improperly, and guidance is needed to prevent accidental exposure among lay person responders, including friends and family members, social workers, home visitors, and other bystanders, who may come into contact with people suffering from an opioid overdose.

OVERVIEW & CONSEQUENCES OF INACTION

When the below precautions are followed, accidental harmful exposure to fentanyl and other fentanyl-like substances is extremely low. However, failure to take immediate action can greatly increase the likelihood that an overdosing patient will die. Calling 9-1-1, providing rescue breathing, and administering naloxone can save a life.

ABOUT FENTANYL AND OTHER FENTANYL-LIKE SUBSTANCES

Fentanyl, carfentanil, acrylfentanyl, and other fentanyl-like substances are all highly potent opioids that can cause depressed breathing, sedation, and low blood pressure. Potent opioids, such as fentanyl and related substances, are extremely dangerous, even in very small amounts, and can pose a risk to lay person responders especially if they inhale or ingest the agent. It is important that you avoid contacting or aerosolizing (disperse into the air) the suspected opioid substance.

INTERVENTIONS TO SAVE A LIFE

If you find someone who you suspect has overdosed, you should:

- 1) Call 9-1-1 immediately. The Good Samaritan Law protects you from prosecution. Don't run; call 9-1-1.
- 2) Rescue Breathing: Tilt the head, lift the chin, and pinch the nose. Give one breath every five seconds
- 3) Naloxone (Narcan)*: Give if you have it. If the first dose does not revive the person, administer a second dose.
- 4) Recovery Position: If you must leave the person alone, place them on his or her left side.

* Naloxone is a medicine that can reverse the effects of opioid drugs, including fentanyl and other fentanyl-like substances, but it has been suggested that larger doses might be required for these more powerful opioids.

GENERAL PRECAUTIONARY GUIDANCE

It is very unlikely that small, unintentional skin exposures to tablets or powder would cause significant opioid toxicity, but both fentanyl and carfentanil can be absorbed through broken skin or inhaled if the powder is airborne. Lay person responders should avoid handling these substances directly.

*** This guidance was created in collaboration with Opioid Operational Command Center representatives from the Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems ***

PREVENTION • TREATMENT • RECOVERY



Before it's too late.

- Avoid contact with dangerous substances and never handle suspicious powders, pills, liquids, or paraphernalia.
- Do not approach a scene where substances have been aerosolized or where powder is visible in the air.
- Beware and avoid sharps/needles that may contain an opioid or infectious agent.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nitrile gloves can prevent accidental exposure through the skin.
- If gloves are not available, the likelihood of accidental exposure through bare skin is incredibly low if the precautions in this document are followed. Wash your hands or skin area with soap and water if there is any contact. DO NOT use hand sanitizers as they can increase absorption through the skin.
- Respiratory protection is not necessary for lay person responders, as they should avoid responding to a scene where substances have been aerosolized.

DESIGNATE A SAFETY OFFICER

Organizations that have employees who may come into contact with overdosing individuals or dangerous opioids should designate a safety officer for their organization. Using this guidance and other available resources, the safety officer should develop organization-specific guidance that provides employees with life-saving opioid response skills and prepares them for potential hazards.

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