



INFORMATION

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever initially used as an anesthetic. Because it easily dissolves in water, fentanyl passes through the blood-brain barrier very quickly making it 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. It is known as a “fast in, fast out” drug.

Once in the brain, fentanyl floods opioid receptors releasing dopamine throughout the body killing pain, easing anxiety and giving the ‘high’ feeling.

Fentanyl also affects the opioid receptors in the brain stem, telling the body to slow down its breathing. Too much of the chemical results in the body turning off its natural breathing reflex and breathing can stop in seconds.

Illegally made fentanyl (and carfentanyl) has made its way into the drug market for recreational use and is now termed a public health crisis as one of the leading causes of accidental death in Canada.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF AN OVERDOSE

- Respiratory distress
- Drowsiness
- Limp body
- Reduced level of consciousness
- Nervous system depression
- Nausea/vomiting
- Cool/clammy skin
- Cyanosis
- Pinpoint pupils

TREATMENT

Once fentanyl overdose symptoms begin, it is important to treat immediately using personal protective equipment such as gloves and a pocket mask.

- Remove any remaining sources of fentanyl
- Activate EMS
- Maintain ABCs
- If patient is not breathing effectively, start CPR
- Treat for shock

NALOXONE

Naloxone is sometimes used to counter the effects of opiates such as fentanyl. This medication is typically administered via intramuscular injection or a nasal spray, is short-acting and typically several doses are needed to counteract one overdose.

The usage of naloxone requires advanced knowledge and specialized training including how to administer the medication and its side effects.

