



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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Public Health Division

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

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| To: | Santa Cruz County Healthcare Providers |
| From: | Gail Newel, MD, MPH, County Health Officer |
| Subject: | Increase in Fatal Drug Overdoses from Fentanyl |
| Date: | July 22, 2021 |

Situational Update: Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. Because of fentanyl's high potency, it poses a greater risk for overdose. Non-prescribed fentanyl is being sold in counterfeit pressed pills, marketed as Norco[®], Percocet[®], Xanax[®], and Oxycontin[®]. Fentanyl is also being sold as heroin in a powder form and has been found in methamphetamines, cocaine, and even illicit cannabis. California is one of 16 states with a greater than 50% increase in fatal overdoses involving synthetic opioids in a 12-month comparison (Health Alert Network Advisory: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00438.asp>).

Locally, fatal overdoses from fentanyl nearly quadrupled from 5 in 2019 to 19 in 2020 (May 2021 Santa Cruz Coroner Data). Local Coroner's data indicates that fentanyl is co-occurring with many different substances as noted above.

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- Ensure patients who access ANY street-purchased drugs have Narcan[®] (naloxone) and are aware of the risks of fentanyl.
- Prescribe Narcan[®] (naloxone) to patients. Most health insurance covers naloxone, including Medi-Cal. Patients can also be referred to the programs below:
 - The Santa Cruz County Syringe Service program- www.santacruzhealth.org/SSP
 - By calling/texting the Harm Reduction Coalition of Santa Cruz County hotline at (831)-769-4700,
 - [Janus of Santa Cruz County](http://JanusofSantaCruzCounty.com) (866-526-8772)
 - Dominican Hospital

Patients should be encouraged to keep the medication with them at all times.

- Initiate or refer patients with opioid use disorder to treatment. Medical Assisted Treatment (MAT) can be accessed at all the community clinics and health care entities in Santa Cruz and can also be initiated at both Emergency Rooms through ED Bridge (CABridge.org). See [Recovery Wave](#) for specific information on access to MAT.

- Advise patients who use drugs to test their drugs with fentanyl test strips. Patients can get fentanyl test strips from:
 - Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency Syringe Service Program
 - North County: 1060 Emeline Ave, Rm 105, Santa Cruz CA 95060-Please use north entrance of Building F
 - 10 am to 1pm on Mondays and Fridays, 4-6 pm on Wednesday and Thursdays or 5-7 pm on Tuesdays,
 - South County: 1430 Freedom Blvd., Suite D, Watsonville CA 95076 (Please use Crestview Dr. side entrance of building D and ring the doorbell)
 - *Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 3:30-4:30 pm, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10:30-11:30 am*
 - By calling or texting the Harm Reduction Coalition of Santa Cruz County at 831-769-4700 for mobile delivery.

- Advise patients and family members of the following key messages:
 - **Be wary** of counterfeit pills
 - **Assume** that all non-prescribed substances contain fentanyl
 - **Test** your drugs for fentanyl using fentanyl test strips (see below on how to get testing strips)
 - **Never** use alone (friends can save your life!)
 - **Start** low and go slow (watch and wait before using more)
 - **Always** have Narcan[®] (naloxone) in case of an overdose
 - **Avoid Dangerous Combinations** Fentanyl is especially dangerous when mixed with benzos such as Xanax and Klonopin, but mixing it unknowingly other opiates such as heroin, Vicodin, or Oxycontin or even with alcohol can also lead to an overdose very quickly.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Fentanyl Facts](#) – Developed in partnership with SafeRx Santa Cruz County
- Never Use Alone: <https://neverusealone.com/>
- Submitting drugs at a lab for testing https://www.drugsdata.org/send_sample.php
- More about fentanyl, safety, and testing <https://harmreduction.org/issues/fentanyl/>



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Santa Cruz County

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.