



OVERDOSE RESPONSE STRATEGY

PUBLIC HEALTH | PUBLIC SAFETY | PARTNERSHIP



September 2024
GCHIDTA-ARORS-BU0015-2024

Informational Bulletin

New Trend of Smoking Fentanyl

Overview

(U) Orally ingesting counterfeit pills containing fentanyl or injecting it directly, has been the main method of ingesting fentanyl. However, the trend of smoking fentanyl has become increasingly common in various parts of the United States over the last 2 years and has even become the most common form of ingestion in places like California and other places along the West coast.^{1,2,3,4} The trend of smoking fentanyl as a form of ingestion is spreading to other parts of the country to include Arkansas.

Details

(U) Based on intelligence reports and law enforcement data, fentanyl and other opioids have now become the greatest threat for the GC HIDTA region. Mexican cartels are responsible for producing and supplying fentanyl to the United States market and China remains the primary supplier of the precursor chemicals to the cartels.⁵ This threat placement is an overall assessment that includes overdose deaths (single and “cocktail” mix) attributed to an increase in fentanyl charges as well as seizures and investigations involving the increased presence of fentanyl products throughout the Gulf Coast HIDTA AOR. Counterfeit prescription pills laced with fentanyl, particularly blue M-30 pills, have become the dominant form of fentanyl in Arkansas while fentanyl powder is also prevalent.



Source: National Public Radio NPR

Smoking Fentanyl

(U) Smoking fentanyl isn't as potent as injecting it, however, fentanyl users originally began smoking fentanyl rather than injecting it to avoid the medical issues and risks associated with injecting it.⁶ Now, users are turning to smoking the more commonly found fentanyl pills for different reasons.

(U) By first burning off the binder or filler in the fentanyl pill, it becomes possible to smoke just the fentanyl portion causing the high to set on quicker. Users will heat up the pills on a piece of foil or in a glass pipe, with the intent of the pill evenly burning, most likely to not overheat the actual deposit of Fentanyl found in the pill.



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The consistency of the wanted reaction to the burn is that the melted substance moves freely on the foil, almost resembling a butter-like consistency^{7,8}

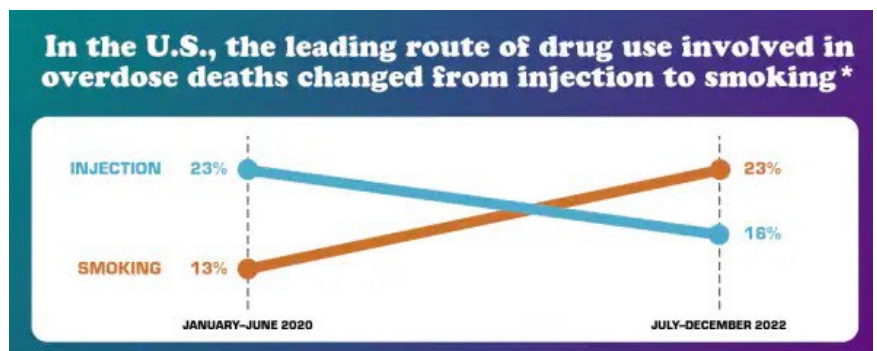
Does Burning Fentanyl Smell Like Popcorn?

(U) Some claim that when a pill containing fentanyl is burned, it smells like popcorn.⁹ There seems to be no consistency to this claim as many articles on the web claim this to be false while many commenters on various sub reddit drug use forums claim it to be true.^{10,11} Fentanyl alone does not have a smell so it is unclear if the smell comes from the burning of binding agents contained within a fentanyl pill or from the fentanyl itself.

Harm Reductions Efforts and Dangers of Smoking Fentanyl

(U) Some early research suggests that smoking fentanyl is somewhat less deadly than injecting it.¹² The idea behind this is that by smoking the fentanyl instead of taking a pill, the high comes on faster, reducing the chance that a user will take more pills while waiting for the high to set on. The other reason is that smoking instead of injecting reduces the diseases and health issues that come with injecting fentanyl. Health departments in various states have begun providing fentanyl smoking supplies to users under harm reduction initiatives albeit with pushback from the community.¹³

(U) There is no conclusive evidence to support that smoking fentanyl instead of injecting it or ingesting it orally reduces overdoses. In February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a study that suggested smoking fentanyl was increasingly linked to overdose deaths in 27 states and D.C. The study drew on mortality data from medical examiners and coroners and witness reports. Comparing six-month periods in 2020 and 2022, researchers found overdose deaths with evidence of smoking increased nearly 74 percent, while cases linked to injections dropped significantly.¹⁴ The study found that in late 2022, of the deaths for which a method was identified, 23% of the deaths occurred after smoking, 16% after injections, 16% after snorting, and 14.5% after swallowing.¹⁵



Source: CDC.gov

(U) There is a less obvious risk that comes with smoking fentanyl from a glass pipe that may be used for other drugs. If a fentanyl user shares a glass pipe that has been previously used to smoke fentanyl with a non-fentanyl user, there is a risk passed on to the non-fentanyl user from fentanyl resin left in the pipe. The non-



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fantanyl user would naturally have a lower tolerance and would possibly be unaware that fentanyl residue is in the pipe they are using.¹⁶

Summary

Using fentanyl, regardless of the route of ingestion carries a substantial risk. It is difficult to parse out an accurate number of how many overdose deaths are truly occurring from smoking fentanyl. Unless there are fentanyl smoking supplies found at the scene of an overdose it's hard to know how the fentanyl was ingested. Despite this, the data still shows an increase in the amount of overdose deaths occurring from smoking fentanyl.

For questions or to provide additional information please contact ARORSA@gchidta.org.

Feedback can be provided at: <https://www.nhac.org/SurveySite/SurveyPage.aspx?LMSID=ea3fd276-a7f2-43dd-af56-b039e95dc333>

This report was prepared based on information received from:

- ¹ [Full article: Fentanyl smoking in San Francisco: Early signs of a new connoisseurship \(tandfonline.com\)](#)
- ² [Health risks associated with smoking versus injecting fentanyl among people who use drugs in California - ScienceDirect](#)
- ³ [Smoking Fentanyl, Rising in SF, Is a Deadly New Risk for Overdose | UC San Francisco \(ucsf.edu\)](#)
- ⁴ [Changes in injecting versus smoking heroin, fentanyl, and methamphetamine among people who inject drugs in San Diego, California, 2020 to 2023 - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)
- ⁵ 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Drug Threat Assessment
- ⁶ [More people die after smoking drugs than injecting them, US study finds | AP News](#)
- ⁷ [More overdose deaths are from smoking drugs than injecting them \(statnews.com\)](#)
- ⁸ West Texas HIDTA Quarterly Bulletin July-September 2022
- ⁹ [Popcorn smell: r/NoStupidQuestions \(reddit.com\)](#)
- ¹⁰ [PolitiFact | Following your nose won't find fentanyl, experts say, but using test strips will](#)
- ¹¹ [Does Fentanyl-Laced Cannabis Smell Like Popcorn? | Cannabis Now](#)
- ¹² [Routes of Drug Use Among Drug Overdose Deaths — United States, 2020–2022 | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- ¹³ [Injecting fentanyl is dangerous. Should users be encouraged to smoke it? - The Washington Post](#)
- ¹⁴ [Routes of Drug Use Among Drug Overdose Deaths — United States, 2020–2022 | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- ¹⁵ [Routes of Drug Use Among Drug Overdose Deaths — United States, 2020–2022 | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- ¹⁶ [Smoking Fentanyl, Rising in SF, Is a Deadly New Risk for Overdose | UC San Francisco \(ucsf.edu\)](#)



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