

# Non-Pharmaceutical Opioids

## Health Risks, Harm Reduction, & Responding to an Overdose

Non-pharmaceutical opioids, or illicit opioids, are opioids obtained in some way that was not prescribed by a medical provider through a licensed pharmacy. Non-pharmaceutical opioids are dangerous as they may be tainted with other substances, even if they appear the same as opioids from a pharmacy. This document will describe the risks of using non-pharmaceutical opioids.

### Health Risks of Non-Pharmaceutical Opioids:

#### Contaminated Supply:

- Substances like fentanyl, which is a synthetic opioid that is 80-100 times stronger than morphine, are often added to non-pharmaceutical opioid supplies<sup>2</sup>.
- The United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) found in 2021 that four out of every ten of the 20 million pills seized contained enough fentanyl to cause an overdose<sup>1</sup>.

#### Disease and Health Complications:

- Seeking non-pharmaceutical opioids may be a result of symptoms of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)
- Using non-pharmaceutical opioids intravenously (injecting) without sterile equipment may result in serious infections like Hepatitis C or HIV/AIDS
- Non-pharmaceutical opioids and intravenous (IV) use are linked to higher rates of accidental overdose

### Harm Reduction:

#### Preventing Overdose and Infection

While non-pharmaceutical opioid use is discouraged, this advice may keep you safe in the event of use:

- **Carry naloxone** (sold under the brand name Narcan) to rapidly reverse an overdose
- **Carry fentanyl test strips** to monitor your supply for fentanyl contamination
- **Avoid IV use**, but ensure needles are clean and not shared in the event of IV use
- **Avoid using alone**, but visit [NeverUseAlone.com](http://NeverUseAlone.com) if you don't have someone to use with safely

### Signs of Overdose



Slow or irregular breathing



Pinpoint size pupils



Blue/purple lips or fingernails



Unresponsive to voice or touch



Slow or irregular heartbeat



Pale, clammy skin

### Responding to an Overdose

1. Try to wake the person	2. Call 911	3. Give naloxone (Narcan)	4. Support their breathing	5. Check for breathing
Shake their shoulders and shout their name.	An overdose is a medical emergency.	Even if you aren't sure it is an overdose.	Start rescue breaths/CPR if possible.	If it does not return within 2-3 minutes, give more naloxone.

#### References

1. [https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/DEA-OPCK\\_FactSheet-07262022.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/DEA-OPCK_FactSheet-07262022.pdf)
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/index.html>