

How to Respond to **Fentanyl Contamination** as an Employer

This information is specific to employers with employees who may encounter fentanyl contamination in the workplace.

Exposure to fentanyl can be a cause for concern and is sometimes dangerous for employees. This guide answers questions you may have on how to respond to fentanyl contamination as an employer. It also provides information on how to minimize the risk of exposure for you and your employees.



What does fentanyl look like?

There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illicit fentanyl. Both pharmaceutical and illicit fentanyl are synthetic opioids, which reduce pain and produce feelings of euphoria.

Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain. Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed as a lozenge, spray, or adhesive patch applied to skin. Intravenous fentanyl is also used for medical procedures or to treat severe pain for people who are hospitalized. People sometimes use pharmaceutical fentanyl in unapproved ways, which can leave contamination behind. For instance, people sometimes cut up fentanyl patches to expose the fentanyl inside.

Illicit fentanyl includes fentanyl that is illegally manufactured as well as fentanyl that is legally manufactured and used in an unapproved manner. Illicit fentanyl commonly occurs in pill, powder, or liquid form. The pills are frequently manufactured to look like other prescription drugs, such as oxycodone. It can be injected, snorted, smoked, ingested (as a pill), or spiked onto blotter paper. It is often mixed with fillers or other drugs like meth. The following images are examples of pharmaceutical fentanyl (left) and illicit fentanyl (right).



What should my employee do if they enter a space where fentanyl was manufactured?

Illegal fentanyl manufacturing in the United States mainly occurs in the form of pill presses. Visible evidence of fentanyl manufacturing might include pill presses, molds and punches that shape powdered fentanyl, stamps used to imprint designs on the pills, bulking agents, laboratory equipment, large mixing containers, and the presence or storage of large amounts of drugs and other chemicals. If your employee finds visible evidence of drug manufacturing or storage, your employee should immediately leave, close off the area, and contact their supervisor. The supervisor, management representative, or someone else in charge should report it to law enforcement. No one should enter the area until told by state or local authorities that it is safe.



Example of a pill press

What should my employee do if they enter a space where fentanyl was used?

If your employee sees someone who has used fentanyl, they should assist if needed. It is safe to help someone who has overdosed. Here is [guidance](#) on how to help someone experiencing overdose.

If your employee enters an empty area with visible evidence of fentanyl or other drug use, they should close off the area to customers and contact their supervisor. Employees should not attempt to clean up the area unless they have received training on how to do so safely. Depending on the amount and form present, drug cleanup can be dangerous and requires special training to safely remove it from surfaces to prevent further exposure to others. DOH and L&I are developing guidance on how to clean up fentanyl contamination left behind by previous users.

Visible evidence of fentanyl use may include damaged dermal patches, crushed pills, powder residue, smoke, spilled liquid from illicit or pharmaceutical drug containers, and injection and other drug use paraphernalia. It is not possible to visually determine if the evidence of drug use is from fentanyl or other illicit drugs.

Symptoms of fentanyl exposure

Recent research has found a high prevalence of detectable levels of fentanyl in public spaces, but these have not been linked to clinical effects or overdose in workers or the public. Still, we recommend employees limit their fentanyl and other illicit drug exposure as much as possible.

When used, fentanyl and fentanyl analogs can cause a wide range of symptoms, including:

- Analgesia (pain relief)
- nausea
- disorientation
- low blood pressure
- difficulty or slow breathing
- dizziness
- impaired consciousness
- abnormal heart rates
- drowsiness
- lightheadedness
- constricted pupils
- death

Overdose from exposure to leftover fentanyl is extremely unlikely for employees. However, if they are exposed to high concentrations of fentanyl contamination without appropriate PPE, it is possible they could experience other symptoms. Distress and anxiety from a potential fentanyl exposure can cause physical symptoms. Employees should be educated on the symptoms of fentanyl intoxication and are encouraged to report to their supervisors if they feel unwell. If employees experience symptoms after exposure, seek medical help. If you suspect an opioid overdose, administer naloxone immediately and call 911. If naloxone is not available, follow the emergency dispatcher's instructions until emergency responders arrive.

Please see fact sheet [DOH 334-545](#) for more information on the hazards of fentanyl. Learn more about the [risk of overdose](#) from exposure to fentanyl in public places.

Recommendations for the clean up of fentanyl manufacture or storage

DOH has not established cleanup standards for fentanyl. DOH's Clandestine Drug Lab (CDL) program certifies [contractors who are trained](#) to safely clean contaminated drug manufacturing or storage sites. We recommend property owners reach out to these companies for assistance with cleaning up contamination from fentanyl manufacturing or storage.

Fentanyl and methamphetamine are sometimes pressed together into pills. If your employee encounters a methamphetamine CDL or storage, the property owner is required to follow Washington state laws [Chapter 246-205 WAC](#) and [Chapter 64.44 RCW](#). These laws require the property owner and a CDL-certified contractor to submit a work plan on how to clean the contaminated site to their local health officer for approval.

Employers with employees involved in CDL cleaning must also ensure they follow the applicable workplace safety and health regulations enforced by The Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I), such as the [Hazardous Waste Operations \(296-843 WAC\) standard](#).

Does the state have rules about the cleanup of fentanyl from individual use?

L&I DOSH does not have fentanyl-specific rules. However, employers must provide a workplace free from serious, recognized hazards. If employees will be cleaning up fentanyl contamination at a workplace, the employer should include those activities in their [workplace safety program](#) and [Accident Prevention Program](#), and follow applicable L&I safety and health regulations. Employers must train employees on workplace hazards and controls in a language and manner that they understand, including the appropriate use of [personal protective equipment](#) and the safe use of [hazardous chemicals](#).

Helpful Resources

- [NIOSH Health Hazard Evaluation](#): long-term, free evaluation that provides recommendations.
- [L&I DOSH Consultation Program](#): short-term, free consultation service for building safety programs, training, and hazard management.
- [DOH-certified drug lab contractors](#): provides testing, decontamination, and work plan development services.
- [DOH Safe Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces guide \(PDF\)](#): general, non-drug-related cleanup guidance.
- [L&I DOSH Safe Use of Chemical Cleaning Products](#): online training for janitors and custodians.
- [NIEHS Prevention of Occupational Exposure to Fentanyl and Opioids](#): presentation on fentanyl hazards, exposure, PPE, and other resources.
- [NIOSH Fentanyl: Emergency Responders at Risk](#): includes PPE and other hazard prevention recommendations.



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