



Drug Residue in Vehicles

Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide resources on cleaning drug residue from vehicles. A stolen vehicle may contain fentanyl or methamphetamine residue if someone used drugs in it. If a car contains fentanyl residue, it likely also contains methamphetamine residue. In this document, “residue” means any form of fentanyl or methamphetamine leftover from use (whether visible or not) including pills, powder, vapor or smoke build-up, liquid, skin patches, and drug paraphernalia.

Residue has not been documented to cause an overdose in adults. Other reported health effects, such as rashes and headaches, are temporary and are found to go away after leaving the exposure area. Younger children (and pets) may have a higher risk for unintentional exposure due to more contact with surfaces, and more frequent hand-to-mouth (or licking) behavior. Contact your local health department or health care provider if you have more questions about health effects. Naloxone (NARCAN) is safe to use on children and pets in the event of an opioid overdose. [Learn more about naloxone](https://stopoverdose.org/basics/learn-about-naloxone/) (https://stopoverdose.org/basics/learn-about-naloxone/).

Local health departments have authority to determine if property, including vehicles, are considered contaminated and unfit for human use, and may require a vehicle to be professionally tested and decontaminated. Your local health department may contact the Washington State Department of Licensing to retitle the vehicle showing that it is contaminated. Once a vehicle has been declared contaminated, it may not be used or sold; however, it may be decontaminated or demolished.

Contact your insurance agent for information on your possible coverage and their procedures if your car has been stolen and recovered.

If feasible, we recommend assessing the levels of drugs in the vehicle. Learn more about [assessing the levels of drug contamination](https://doh.wa.gov/drugresidue) (https://doh.wa.gov/drugresidue).

Decontamination by Certified Contractors

Vehicle decontamination is a complicated process that requires specialized training and equipment. The Department of Health (DOH) has a [list of certified drug lab clean up contractors](https://doh.wa.gov/drug-lab-cleanup-companies) (https://doh.wa.gov/drug-lab-cleanup-companies); some of these contractors can also safely provide vehicle decontamination. Their services include the selection and use of appropriate decontamination products and personal protective equipment (PPE), assessment of what drugs are present and at what levels, removal of materials, especially porous materials like carpets and seats, and post-decontamination testing. If the HVAC system is contaminated, contractors can decontaminate it with specialized equipment and products.

[Alberta, Canada has guidance on how to decontaminate vehicles of fentanyl](https://open.alberta.ca/publications/fentanyl-remediation)

(https://open.alberta.ca/publications/fentanyl-remediation), including the HVAC system. Brief guidance on decontaminating vehicles is in [EPA’s Voluntary Guidelines for Meth and Fentanyl Lab Cleanup \(PDF\)](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/meth_lab_guidelines.pdf) (https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/meth_lab_guidelines.pdf).

We recommend you use a decontamination contractor if levels of drug residue are unknown or if you know the level of fentanyl residue in your vehicle is greater than the American Conference of Government Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) surface limit for fentanyl of 1 µg/100 cm² or if the level of methamphetamine is above the WA decontamination standard of 1.5 µg/100 cm². In this case, you should not clean drug residue yourself or use regular vehicle cleaning or detailing services.

DIY Cleaning

If you are going to clean the vehicle yourself, you can lower your potential for exposure using the practices below. It is important to wear protective clothing such as gloves and an N95 mask. Remember to wash your hands, don't touch your face, and do not eat or drink while assessing or cleaning drug residue. Always follow label requirements for all products, including PPE, dilution, and how long to leave the product on before wiping off.

Selecting a Cleaning Product

General household cleaners are useful for removing drugs from surfaces, but do not break them down. This means that the active drug may be in the wastewater or on the used wipe. Don't let wastewater dry on surfaces, as the drug residue will remain on the surface if not removed before the wastewater dries.

There are also neutralizing solutions that break down fentanyl or methamphetamine. However, neutralizing solutions can be difficult to use and require more PPE.

For more information on selecting a cleaning product, see the [Drug Residue webpage](https://doh.wa.gov/drugresidue) (<https://doh.wa.gov/drugresidue>).

Cleaning Process

Needles or other paraphernalia may be present. Do not pick up sharp objects by hand, instead use tongs, forceps, or other means. If picking up by hand cannot be avoided, avoid picking up by the sharp end and wear heavy work gloves. Put the sharp object into a sharps container or other hard plastic container for disposal.

1. Pre-wet/mist all surfaces to prevent particles from going into the air. Open the doors or windows to allow for ventilation.
2. Dispose of items that will not be cleaned (including garbage), particularly porous materials that are very difficult to remove drug residue from.
3. Machine wash or pressure wash removable porous materials like floor mats. If not removable, clean textiles by spraying cleaning solution and letting sit according to the label instructions. Wet vacuum or scrub the material with more cleaning solution using hot water.
4. To clean other porous materials wash surfaces, rinse well, and repeat. If possible, use a wet vacuum to dry the material to reduce moisture and prevent mold growth.
5. For non-porous substances like glass and metal, wash these hard surfaces and rinse well.
6. Unless you use a neutralizing solution, wet vacuum or wipe up wastewater on surfaces before it dries.
7. Follow all scrubbing of surfaces with [HEPA-equipped vacuuming](https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/what-hepa-filter) (<https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/what-hepa-filter>) if possible once materials are dry. Do not vacuum with a non-HEPA vacuum.
8. Dispose of all items, including cleaning materials and PPE according to local waste regulations.

What is a porous surface? Any materials with pores, or holes, in which drugs can become trapped and are not easily wiped off. Examples include wood, carpet, leather, vinyl, and fabric.

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