

The Oregon Health Authority and the [Overdose Response Strategy](#) want to alert local public health officials and healthcare providers about re-emerging novel substances in the drug supply linked to increased fatal and non-fatal overdoses in Northeastern Oregon and Southeast Washington.

This message provides information about what you can do to protect your patients and communities and includes resources to support you.

Carfentanil, a potent synthetic analogue of illegally made fentanyl (IMF) is estimated to be 100 times more potent than fentanyl and 10,000 times more potent than morphine and was linked to a significant rise in fatal overdoses throughout the United States, most notably from 2016-2020.¹ According to the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS), from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, carfentanil was linked to 277 deaths across 32 jurisdictions in 2020.² Deaths related to carfentanil saw a dramatic decline with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, decreasing to just 29 deaths nationally in 2022.²

Recently, carfentanil has begun to re-emerge in the illicit drug market, coinciding with reported increases in fatal and non-fatal overdoses in Northeastern Oregon and Southeast Washington. In the first quarter of 2024, the Oregon State Police Crime Lab identified 4 separate seizures with samples that contained carfentanil in both counterfeit pills and powder. While the sample size of carfentanil found in drug seizure data is small, stark increases in trends from previous years are concerning given the increased overdose risk associated with carfentanil.

As overdose deaths in Oregon continue to rise, disproportionately affecting communities of color and those with higher economic hardship, it is crucial to inform people who use drugs (PWUD) of the shifts in local drug markets and the high potency of novel substances being identified when information is available.

Implications on the health and safety for people at risk of overdose:

1. With the re-emergence of carfentanil in the illicit drug market, PWUD in Oregon – including those intentionally using fentanyl – may be at an increased risk of unintentional overdose and death. Carfentanil is an extremely powerful opioid that is harmful even in very small quantities.
 - a. PWUD who are not currently engaged in services, such as harm reduction or overdose prevention services are particularly vulnerable to unintentional overdose, as they may be unaware of changes in the local drug supply.
 - b. Due to its potency, dosing of carfentanil is extremely difficult and the risk of an unintentional overdose event is high.
 - c. People leaving correctional facilities and court-ordered treatment programs where they have detoxed from opioid use, and therefore have lowered tolerance for opioids are at an increased risk of unintentional overdose.
2. PWUD may be unaware of Oregon’s Good Samaritan overdose law (ORS 475.898), which provides legal protection to anyone helping someone experiencing a drug overdose when they call 911.
3. Naloxone successfully reverses carfentanil overdose. While multiple doses of naloxone may be administered to reduce a carfentanil overdose, there is not evidence that high-dose brands of

1. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6910a4.htm?s_cid=mm6910a4_w
2. https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/sudors-dashboard-fatal-overdose-data.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/fatal/dashboard/index.html

naloxone increase overdose survival. Increased distribution and availability of naloxone for PWUD is critical.

What public health, public safety, and healthcare providers can do:

1. **Public Health:** Explore methods for rapidly identifying overdose increases using available surveillance systems including ESSENCE, EMS data, and ODMAP. Utilize qualitative data reports and information from harm reduction and peer service organizations.
 - a. Work with your public safety agencies, including EMS, fire, and police to understand drug overdose calls and trafficking trends in your area. Work towards engaging public safety partners in local overdose response.
 - b. Raise awareness among key partners and stakeholders to the widening drug supply landscape in your area and educate them about the potency of newly and re-emerging novel substances.
 - c. Develop non-stigmatizing public health messaging about fentanyl and synthetic analogues that highlights the toxicity and potential lethality of these substances. Emphasize harm reduction and overdose prevention language.
 - d. Continue to educate community members on recognizing and responding to overdoses. Share the "[How to Give Naloxone](#)" videos currently available in English and Spanish.
2. **Public Safety:** Share data on fentanyl and fentanyl analogue seizures with your local public health department and medical examiner's office.
 - a. Carry a supply of naloxone so that it can be deployed immediately to mitigate the effects of an overdose.
 - b. Work with your local public health partners to create naloxone leave behind programs for those at risk of an overdose. [The Save Lives Oregon Clearinghouse](#) has naloxone programs to support uniformed agencies participating in leave behind.
3. **Healthcare Providers:** Screen patients for substance use disorder so they can receive appropriate behavioral health and treatment supports.
 - a. Refer people to [harm reduction services in your area](#). By engaging in regular harm reduction services, people will have access to updated overdose prevention information and tools.
 - b. Facilitate access to Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT). MAT is comprehensive approach to address the needs of people with opioid use disorder that combines medication treatment with behavioral therapies.

Overdose prevention messaging to share broadly:

1. Unless a pharmacist directly hands you a prescription pill, assume it is counterfeit and contains fentanyl or fentanyl analogues.
2. Assume any substances obtained from social media, the internet, or a friend are counterfeit and contain fentanyl or fentanyl analogues.
3. If you are using illicit substances, don't use alone and always have naloxone on hand and visible. If everyone is planning to use, take turns so that someone is awake who can give

1. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6910a4.htm?s_cid=mm6910a4_w
2. https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/sudors-dashboard-fatal-overdose-data.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/fatal/dashboard/index.html

naloxone and dial 911 if someone overdoses.

4. You do not need to use alone. Use a hotline service like the [Never Use Alone Hotline](#) (877-696-1996) or an overdose detection app like the [Brave App](#) to help you stay safer.
5. Test your drugs with fentanyl test strips before you use them. Fentanyl test strips can often be accessed at local harm reduction sites. Be aware that even if your drugs test negative, they may still contain fentanyl. Fentanyl test strips might not detect more potent fentanyl analogues, like carfentanil. This is one reason why it's important to never use alone.
6. An overdose is always a medical emergency; call 911 immediately. Oregon's Good Samaritan Law protects the caller and the person who has overdosed.

If you are looking to create better engagement and communication with public safety partners in your area, please reach out to Isabelle Cisco, Oregon Public Health Analyst, icisco@cdcfoundation.org

If you need access to harm reduction supplies or access to naloxone for leave-behind programs, looking into [Save Lives Oregon](#).

1. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6910a4.htm?s_cid=mm6910a4_w
2. https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/sudors-dashboard-fatal-overdose-data.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/fatal/dashboard/index.html