



# Fentanyl Abuse on the Rise Among Youth

*Local Law Enforcement, Health Officials warn of growing danger to kids*



***In Clovis Unified we focus on partnering with families*** to develop healthy young people. Parent Bulletins are designed to empower families with information about issues or dangers emerging in youth culture, and to equip parents with tools to engage their students in conversations, find resources, and avoid dangerous and sometimes life-threatening behaviors threatening our youth today.

Use of the synthetic opioid, Fentanyl, among youth in the Western U.S. has sharply increased in recent years. According to Fresno County District Attorney Lisa Smittcamp, the drug was responsible for the overdoses of five teens in the space of just a few hours this January, one example of the growing danger to youth in our area. Smittcamp and other health and law enforcement officials are urging families to have tough conversations with their kids about the dangers of any type of drug use, and to establish lines of communication and support for their children now to help avoid future dangers.

*“You have to talk to your children and tell them, ‘This stuff will kill you. Don’t use it. If you have issues, help us. Let’s talk about it as a family. Talk to your pastors, talk to your older siblings, talk to your uncle. Whoever it is...’ Encourage them to foster those communicative relationships.”*

*Fresno County District Attorney Lisa Smittcamp,  
On the rising number of fentanyl overdoses among area youth.*

## What is Fentanyl?

Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, that is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. It is approved for prescription use in the U.S. to treat severe pain. While approved as a prescription drug, it can be redirected for abuse or misuse by those without a medical need. While prescription fentanyl is extremely dangerous, most recent cases of fentanyl-related overdose, death and injury in America are associated with illegally made and distributed fentanyl. Sold through the illegal drug trade, it is often mixed with other highly addictive and dangerous drugs like heroin and cocaine. Because of its potency, a single encounter with fentanyl (knowingly or unknowingly) can be deadly.

## What’s the Source?

According to Fresno County law enforcement, area youth have been found to order illegal fentanyl through online sources and have the drugs delivered secretly to their homes (avoiding Ring doorbells and other technology parents may believe provide oversight by directing dealers to leave drugs in plants or under rocks). In other instances, instead of a “designated driver” youth are designating an individual to carry the overdose medication Naloxone (brand names Narcan and Evzio) as others experiment with drugs that could contain fentanyl. However, given the potency of fentanyl, this antidote is often ineffective and/or may require multiple doses to counteract the deadly effects of fentanyl.

“You don’t deserve to die as an adolescent when you make a bad mistake, you deserve to have a life and know what you are getting into, and that’s really the injustice in this for me as a mother and as a prosecutor who was born and raised here. I hate to see this happening in our community,” said D.A. Smittcamp during a February 2021 press conference on the topic.

# How to Spot the Signs of Teen or Young Adult Substance Abuse

Partnership to End Addiction. 2020. New York. Partnership Committee.

Figuring out if your child is using substances can be challenging. Many of the signs and symptoms are typical teen or young adult behavior. Many are also symptoms of mental health issues, including depression or anxiety. If you have reason to suspect use, don't be afraid to err on the side of caution. Prepare to take action and have a conversation during which you can ask direct questions like "Have you been drinking, vaping or using drugs?" No parent wants to hear "yes," but being prepared for how you would respond can be the starting point for a more positive outcome.

## Shifts in mood & personality

- Sullen, withdrawn or depressed
- Less motivated
- Silent, uncommunicative
- Hostile, angry, uncooperative
- Deceitful or secretive
- Unable to focus
- A sudden loss of inhibitions
- Hyperactive or unusually elated

## Behavioral changes

- Changed relationships with family members or friends
- Absenteeism or a loss of interest in school, work or other activities
- Avoids eye contact
- Locks doors
- Disappears for long periods of time
- Goes out often, frequently breaking curfew
- Secretive with the use of their phone
- Makes endless excuses
- Uses chewing gum or mints to cover up breath
- Often uses over-the-counter preparations to reduce eye reddening or nasal irritation
- Has cash flow problems
- Has become unusually clumsy: stumbling, lacking coordination, poor balance

- Has periods of sleeplessness or high energy, followed by long periods of "catch up" sleep

## Hygiene & appearance

- Smell of smoke or other unusual smells on breath or on clothes
- Messier than usual appearance
- Poor hygiene
- Frequently red or flushed cheeks or face
- Burns or soot on fingers or lips
- Track marks on arms or legs (or long sleeves in warm weather to hide marks)

## Physical health

- Frequent sickness
- Unusually tired and/or lethargic
- Unable to speak intelligibly, slurred speech or rapid-fire speech
- Nosebleeds and/or runny nose, not caused by allergies or a cold
- Sores, spots around mouth
- Sudden or dramatic weight loss or gain
- Skin abrasions/bruises
- Frequent perspiration
- Seizures and/or vomiting

Read the whole article at <https://drugfree.org/article/spotting-drug-use/>.

## START A CONVERSATION

Because opioids are available by prescription, many children and teens don't understand their danger, and even fewer recognize that heroin is an opioid. Many also do not realize that dangerous fentanyl is added to many street drugs. Misusing opioids can be harmful and can alter the course of young peoples' lives, preventing them from reaching their full potential. That's reason enough to have this difficult conversation with your children. Be certain that the discussion focuses on how much you care about your child's health.

- Be a good listener.
- Set clear expectations about drug and alcohol use, including real consequences for not following family rules.
- Help your child deal with peer pressure to use drugs.
- Get to know your child's friends and their parents.
- If concerned, have your child evaluated for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety.
- Monitor your child's whereabouts.
- Carefully monitor your child's medications.
- Do not leave unused opioids in accessible places in your home.
- Supervise teen activities.
- Talk to your child often.
- Do not ignore signs that your child is changing in negative ways.