

URGING DEVELOPMENT OF A DANE COUNTY PROGRAM TO MAKE FENTANYL TESTING STRIPS ACCESSIBLE TO RESIDENTS TO PREVENT OPIOID OVERDOSE DEATHS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention categorizes fentanyl as a synthetic opioid, FDA-approved for treating severe pain, which is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 80-100 times stronger than morphine. There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illicitly manufactured fentanyl. Both are considered synthetic opioids.

Fentanyl or a fentanyl analog is often added to other drugs such as heroin, and increasingly to a broader mix of street drugs including cocaine, crack, methamphetamine, and other opioids, to make their manufacture cheaper. Because fentanyl can't be seen, smelled, or tasted it is currently impossible to know if a drug has been laced with fentanyl without testing for it. And because of its extreme potency, only a small amount of fentanyl is required for the substance to become fatal. Fentanyl is becoming a major contributor to fatal and non-fatal accidental overdoses in the U.S. and locally, with the Midwest and Northeast being hit particularly hard by this phenomenon.

From 2018 to 2020 the rate of opioid-related emergency room visits in Wisconsin increased from 4.6% to 24.2%. In this same period, opioid-related deaths in Wisconsin increased from 8.7% to 45.6%.ⁱ

In Dane County during this same 3-year period, total opioid deaths climbed from 85 annually to 123 annually, with synthetic opioid-related deaths accounting for an increase from 61 to 106. From 2018 to 2020, Dane County's synthetic opioid death rate was 15.9 per 100,000, which exceeded the state's rate of 12.7 per 100,000 people. This trend was exacerbated by the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and does not show signs of abating.

With 28.4 American Indian, 25.1 Black, 12.8 non-Hispanic, 11.8 White, 10.9 Hispanic, and 1.2 Asian deaths from synthetic opioid overdoses between 2018 and 2020, there is a disproportionate racial and ethnic impact to this crisis in Dane County, as well.

In April 2021, Public Health Madison & Dane County and the Madison Police Department issued a public health alert due to an increase in drug-involved overdoses in Dane County. One possible reason for this spike is that strong opioids, most commonly fentanyl and fentanyl analogs, are increasingly and unknowingly being added to illicit street drugs being used in the Dane County community.

39 In pilot fentanyl test strip programs across the country, the programs found:

- 40 • Low-cost fentanyl testing strips are accurate and easy-to-use with minimal
41 instruction, detecting the absence or presence of even the smallest amounts of
42 fentanyl in another substance;
- 43 • Drug users communicate positive test results within user communities, causing
44 deterrence;
- 45 • Test strips are a useful engagement tool to foster discussion with users regarding
46 NARCAN, rehabilitation services, etc.;
- 47 • Test strips allow providers to better engage with non-injectors and non-opioid
48 users around overdose prevention and result in an increase in Naloxone training
49 with non-opioid users;
- 50 • Test strips allow users to be more informed about the drugs they are buying and
51 using, leading to behavior change and the adoption of increased harm reduction
52 measures; and
- 53 • Test strips reduce overdose deaths.ⁱⁱ

54 Those in our community struggling with addiction currently can receive help through
55 PHMDC's syringe service program and access to injectable Naloxone and nasal
56 Narcan, as well as overdose education and training, at a number of public health
57 offices.

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59 A recent study by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and Rhode Island
60 Hospital/Brown University showed that 86% of drug users would use fentanyl test
61 strips, 84% were worried about fentanyl being present in drugs, and 70% would
62 change their behavior if they knew fentanyl was in the drugs they were using.

63 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Dane County recognizes a growing
64 incidence of hospitalizations and deaths due to overdoses associated with synthetic
65 opioids, particularly with the addition of fentanyl and its analogs to illicit drugs being
66 used in our community.

67 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Dane County recognizes that addiction is a chronic
68 brain disorder, not a moral failing, and targeted harm reduction tools like fentanyl test
69 strips, as well as Narcan (Naloxone), keep people alive and let them have a chance
70 at getting into treatment and living a life in recovery.

71 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that providing for the access to and use of fentanyl
72 testing strips will allow individuals who use drugs, as well as first responders, to test for
73 the presence of fentanyl in drugs both prior to consumption or in response to a
74 suspected overdose, and therefore mitigate the opioid crisis by preventing accidental
75 overdoses and fatalities.

76 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Dane County supports the State of Wisconsin
77 Legislature's current effort, via AB 619, to decriminalize the use of fentanyl testing strips
78 to test a substance for the presence of fentanyl, which is also supported by the

79 Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards, Wisconsin Medical
80 Society, and the Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association, among others.

81 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that Dane County encourages Public Health Madison
82 Dane County to work with the State of Wisconsin Department of Human Services,
83 organizations providing support services for drug users in Dane County, and Dane
84 County first responders, to develop a program by which fentanyl testing strips can be
85 made available to those who need them in order to prevent synthetic opioid-related
86 overdose and death.

ⁱ <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids/dashboards.htm>

ⁱⁱ Findings from fentanyl testing pilot programs in CA, RI, MD, MA, WA, PA