

Fentanyl Exchange Program

Reducing Fentanyl Related Harms in the City of Windsor

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a strong prescription pain narcotic linked to an increasing number of overdoses in Ontario. Narcotics are opioids prescribed to relieve severe pain. Fentanyl affects people in the same way as heroin and morphine. When a patient is in severe pain they place a patch on their skin. The fentanyl is absorbed through the skin over three days. After three days the old patch is replaced with a new one. Used patches can still have more than 50% of the medication left over on the surface ([FDA 2015](#)).

How is fentanyl different than other opioids?

Fentanyl is the strongest of all the opioids. It's 30 to 50 times stronger than heroin ([NIDA 2015](#)) and 80 times stronger than morphine ([EMCDDA 2015](#)). For that reason it is being misused. Being the strongest opioid is the reason why fentanyl has been linked to the rising number of opioid overdoses. An individual that takes too much opioid can pass out, stop breathing, and die. Keeping fentanyl out of the hands of those it is not intended for can help reduce the number of overdose deaths.

What is the Windsor-Essex Fentanyl Exchange Program?

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, Windsor Police Service, and local pharmacists have implemented a pharmacy-based fentanyl exchange program in our city. The program focuses on educating patients about fentanyl and asks patients to bring their used patches back to the pharmacy.

Patients participate by:

1. Learning about fentanyl.
2. Keeping track of their used and unused patches.
3. Keeping their used and unused patches in a safe and secure place.
4. Placing their used patches on the back of the fentanyl program brochure and taking them to their pharmacy in order to receive their refill.

Pharmacies participate by:

1. Dispensing no more than a one-month supply of fentanyl patches at a time.
2. Ensuring that patients are provided with a program brochure. On the back of the brochure is a place for used patches.
3. Instructing each fentanyl patient to return their used patches, on the brochure, to the pharmacy.
4. Pharmacies dispose of used patches in a safe way that protects the environment.
5. Dispensing a new patch for every used patch returned. For example, if a patient returns 10 used patches, the pharmacist would dispense 10 new patches, if that's the amount prescribed.

Why is this program important for our community?

The fentanyl exchange program is important because in Windsor, prescription fentanyl patches are being sold illegally for misuse on the street. These uncontrolled patches increase the risk of fentanyl related harms in our community. Windsor and Essex County had approximately 32 fentanyl overdose deaths between 2007 and 2012. The program does not stop people who really need their prescription fentanyl patches from accessing them, but it makes it more difficult for people to sell or abuse fentanyl patches.

For additional questions about the program contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at 519-258-2146 ext. 3100.

Dec 2015

References:

EMCDDA. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (Jan 8, 2015). Fentanyl drug profile. Retrieved from <http://emcdda.europa.eu/publications/drug-profiles/fentanyl>

FDA. Federal Drug Administration. U.S. Department of Health. (Feb 18, 2015). Fentanyl patch can be deadly to children. Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm300803.htm>

NIDA. National Institute on Drug Abuse. (August 2015). Emerging trends. Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/emerging-trends>