

Montana Health Alert Network
DPHHS HAN
ADVISORY
Cover Sheet



DATE

Mar. 26, 2025

SUBJECT

Increased in suspected fentanyl overdoses in Yellowstone County

INSTRUCTIONS

DISTRIBUTE to your local HAN contacts. This HAN is intended for general sharing of information.

- Time for Forwarding: **As Soon As Possible**
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For LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT reference only
DPHHS Subject Matter Resource for more information regarding this HAN, contact:

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For technical issues related to the HAN message contact the Emergency Preparedness Section at 1-406-444-0919

DPHHS HAN Website:
<https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/phep/han>

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Please ensure that DPHHS is included on your HAN distribution list.
hhshan@mt.gov

Categories of Health Alert Messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Information Service: passes along low level priority messages that do not fit other HAN categories and are for informational purposes only.

Please update your HAN contact information on the Montana Public Health Directory

DPHHS HAN

Information Sheet



DATE

Mar. 26, 2025

SUBJECT

Increase in suspected fentanyl overdoses in Yellowstone County. Awareness for other communities.

BACKGROUND

Pharmaceutical fentanyl, a synthetic and short-acting opioid analgesic, is 50-100 times more potent than morphine, prescribed by doctors to manage severe pain. Although pharmaceutical fentanyl can be diverted for misuse, most cases of fentanyl-related morbidity and mortality have been linked to illegally made fentanyl and fentanyl analogs. While fentanyl-related overdoses can be reversed with naloxone, a higher dose or multiple number of doses per overdose event may be required to revive a patient due to its high potency.

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) monitors changes in overdose volume using several data sets. A spike alert may be issued based on a change in an area's average daily volume of suspected opioid overdoses. Historically, Yellowstone County typically has one or fewer suspected opioid overdoses per day. An alert is triggered if there are three or more overdoses within a 24-hour period. Incidents triggering an overdose spike are verified by a DPHHS epidemiologist.

INFORMATION

Between March 22, 2025, and March 25, 2025, the DPHHS has identified six suspected fentanyl overdoses in Yellowstone County, constituting an overdose spike. One of these overdoses resulted in a fatality.

DPHHS is awaiting additional information from local partners including results of any drug product testing performed specific to these overdoses.

At this point it is unclear whether this overdose spike is indicative of a longer-term trend in increased opioid overdoses or whether it results from unique characteristics of the substance consumed (e.g., contamination, potency, etc.). DPHHS will continue to monitor data for changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Local Health Departments

Raise awareness among key partners and stakeholders, including harm-reduction workers to an increased risk for fentanyl overdose and the potential need for higher doses of naloxone to reverse the overdose.

Develop public health messaging about fentanyl, including fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills and fentanyl-related compounds that emphasizes the toxicity and potential lethality of the drug versus its high "potency." The messaging should include warnings of the highly variable content of fentanyl present in illicit products, which further elevates risk of overdose and the potential need for higher doses of naloxone to reverse the overdose.

Offer low barrier community access to opioid overdose reversal agents like naloxone.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) & Law Enforcement

Be aware of the potential for increased incidence of overdose in your community and for the potential need for additional supply and access to naloxone.

Prioritize and expedite laboratory testing of drug samples taken from drug overdose scenes, if possible.

Be aware that individuals who have overdosed on fentanyl and have received bystander naloxone may be at continued risk for relapse once the naloxone effect has ended.

Medical Examiners & Coroners

Screen for fentanyl in suspected opioid overdose cases in regions reporting increases in fentanyl seizures, fentanyl-related overdose fatalities, or unusually high spikes in heroin or unspecified drug overdose fatalities.

All suspected overdose cases should be referred to a medical examiner to determine if an autopsy is warranted.

Expanding Naloxone Access

Multiple dosages of naloxone may need to be administered per overdose event because of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs' increased potency relative to other opioids.

The State of Montana has issued a [standing order](#) for naloxone that allows Montanans to access naloxone at no cost. To learn more about accessing free naloxone, visit <https://dphhs.mt.gov/BHDD/naloxone/index>.