

PILOT PROJECT

FENTANYL CHECKING

SPRING 2021



MANITOBA
HARM REDUCTION
NETWORK

DUCTION FOR CHANGE HARM REDUCTION IS SAFE INJECTION
HARM REDUCTION IS NO JUDGMENT
HARM REDUCTION IS CHANGING OLD SYSTEMS
HARM REDUCTION IS KEEPING PEOPLE ALIVE
HARM REDUCTION IS MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE
HARM REDUCTION IS CHECKING PERSONAL
HARM REDUCTION IS SAFE INJECTION

FENTANYL CHECKING PILOT PROJECT

BACKGROUND

The Manitoba Harm Reduction Network (MHRN) is a provincial harm reduction advocacy, education, and research organization in Manitoba. The mandate of the MHRN is to work with peers, network members, policymakers, academics, and community leaders to make recommendations regarding the development, implementation, and evaluation of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection prevention initiatives based on evidence and harm reduction.

The MHRN supports Peer Advisory Councils (PACs) at each network site. The members of these groups are people who use drugs and are impacted by HIV, hepatitis C, and are actively involved in preventing the transmission of STBBI in their communities through harm reduction. The PACs inform the organization on issues related to safer drug use, safer sex practices, harm reduction strategies, peer engagement strategies and tools, community based research, program development and implementation, knowledge translation, and support for individuals affected by STBBI, the social determinants of health, and substance use.

In the context of COVID-19 overdose instances and deaths have skyrocketed. Peers and their friends have been dying. In response to this need, the MHRN purchased fentanyl testing strips and supported PAC members in their use.

PURPOSE

This project equipped members of the Winnipeg, Brandon, Flin Flon, The Pas, and North Interlake Peer Advisory Councils with supplies necessary to check their drugs for fentanyl as an overdose prevention strategy. This project provided some limited evaluative data to determine the efficacy of this approach.

PARTNERSHIP

This project represents a partnership between the following groups:

- Manitoba Harm Reduction Network: coordinating the project
- 5 Peer Advisory Councils: executing the project
- Project Safe Audience: drug checking training

METHODS

Members of the 5 participating Peer Advisory Councils were trained to use and received fentanyl test strips. When peers returned for more strips, they were asked to complete a few follow up questions. This was intended to be as low threshold as possible during this time. No personal information was collected. Staff were also available to perform staff facilitated checks on request and dependant on staff capacity. The

instructions created for MHRN staff are provided as Appendix A. This pilot project ran for 3 months in the Spring of 2021

RESULTS

792 fentanyl test strips were distributed in 78 interactions with staff. All people who accessed strips were provided with training either 1:1 or during a PAC meeting. Additionally staff conducted 19 facilitated drug checks.

Of the people who use drugs who did follow up questions, 18 out of 20 were using the strips to check stimulants (methamphetamine and cocaine) and 6 people had reported using the strips to test depressants (opiates or down). Some people used strips to check both stimulants and depressants.

In staff facilitated checks 4 of the 19 turned out positive fentanyl results. 3 of the 4 people who use drugs whose sample tested positive for fentanyl reported that they planned to change their use based on this result.

People who use drugs also reported teaching friends to use strips and testing for both themselves and friends. Particular uptake of the fentanyl test strips was observed in Brandon, Manitoba. This may be attributed to a rise in instances of overdose during COVID-19.

Due to the high number of people who use drugs accessing this resource, the MHRN recommends continuing to distribute fentanyl test strips and training and will pursue ongoing funding for this service.

APPENDIX A

STAFF INSTRUCTIONS

In this project we will be supplying the materials and instructions for PAC members to check their drugs for fentanyl as an overdose prevention strategy. We will focus on providing these supplies for PAC members to check on their own (peer to peer drug checking) there may be instances where PAC members ask you to check their drugs for them (staff facilitated drug checking) so we have provided process and tracking for both methods.

PURCHASING TEST STRIPS

Each site has been approved to spend UP TO 500\$ on test strips from your existing budgets. Please order from BTNX: <https://www.btnx.com/HarmReduction>

Product code FYL-18S7-5 or FYL-1S48-100 They may try to sell you 'kits' but we want the strips only.

OTHER PREP

- Printout instructions: (https://www.btnx.com/files/Fentanyl_Test_Strips_Instructions.pdf)
- Printout Meth testing guidelines (internal link redacted)
- Review Training Materials
 - Full Presentation on how to use Fentanyl Test Strips - <https://youtu.be/vvFs315ggag>
 - Fentanyl Test Positive (voice over) - <https://youtu.be/cLgR0iQ4Rrw>

PEER TO PEER DRUG CHECKING

1. Explain

If the fentanyl strip produces a positive reaction the sample probably contains the believed substance.

Test strips can tell you if the sample contains some fentanyl or analogues (like carfentanil)

Test strips can tell you if the test did not detect fentanyl or analogues (like carfentanil) in the sample

Test **does not** tell you how much fentanyl is in the sample

Test **does not** tell you which fentanyl analogue is in the sample

Test **does not** tell you the sample tested is pure (drugs are almost always adulterated)

Test **does not** tell you the sample tested is safe (overdose is possible even on drugs without detected fentanyl)

Fentanyl may not be evenly distributed throughout a pill/baggie/flap (like chocolate chips in a cookie or trail mix). The test can only tell you if the sample tested contains some fentanyl or if no fentanyl was detected.

2. Demonstrate how to use strips (1st visit)

3. Distribute strips, printout of instructions and meth instructions

4. Remind peers that the test strips work best for opiates

5. Track here (internal link redacted)

STAFF FACILITATED DRUG CHECKING

Fill out tracking table for Staff facilitated checks (internal link redacted)

Tips: Involve the person wanting a test as an equal participant in observing and interpreting the result

Can test the residue left on the cooker after preparing shot

Store at room temperature, do not freeze

IMPORTANT: Never touch the drug sample

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2. Prepare water cup and put on gloves.

Water cup can be small such as a cooker or a shot glass, or any other cup will work. Use tap water.

3. Person takes the sample

(tester does not take or touch the sample)

Powder: get a tiny sample, smaller than a grain of sand

Pill: use the scraper to scrape off a sample

4. Do the test

Person puts sample in container of water- mix together , you do not need much water, just a few ml

Dip in test strip and share result - dip the test strip into the water and substance mixture. Hold the blue part of the test strip and insert the white part into the mixture, up to the solid blue line. Do not insert past the blue line. Hold it there for 15 seconds and then remove from the water.

Wait for results-- You will see results within 2 minutes. After 5 minutes the results become unreliable,

You will be looking for red lines that will appear in the middle of the strip. The top line is the control line -- two lines is no fentanyl present. Top line only means positive for fentanyl and bottom line only means an invalid test that needs to be redone.

If your test comes back positive for fentanyl, do another test, just to be sure.

5. Share harm reduction tips

Dosing strategy - start small and take it easy

Potential risks

Safety tips

6. Test Tracking Form

Record tests used and results obtained

7. Dispose of cup and stick and wipe down surface.

Do not reuse a cooker or consume liquid used for testing – it is toxic.

LEGAL PROTOCOLS FOR DRUG CHECKING

- Review the checking disclaimer
- Drug Checker does not touch the substance
- We cannot tell what all the ingredients are in the drug sample and can't tell purity
- We cannot tell if a drug is safe or unsafe, good or bad
- We do not give thumbs up or celebrate results. It's illegal to encourage someone to commit a crime. We do not encourage the use of any substances.
- We remain neutral in all interactions and give out factual information only
- We provide general harm reduction information at each visit