



# FLASH REPORT

February 28, 2021

An Urgent Public Health Activity Report Within Jackson County

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## Jackson County Public Health Issues an Overdose Alert

Jackson County Public Health is issuing an Overdose Alert for accidental overdoses from illicit opioids. This alert is being issued based on an increase in emergency department admissions, an increase in overdose responses by the Medford Police Department, and three suspect fatal overdoses from illicit opioids in the last two weeks (2/14 – 2/27). Some of the overdoses are suspected to be from fentanyl.

An Overdose Alert is issued because Jackson County Public Health has identified a higher than expected number of accidental overdoses from illicit opioids over a specific period of time.

Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, approved for treating severe pain, typically advanced cancer pain. It is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. It is prescribed in the form of transdermal patches or lozenges and can be diverted for misuse and abuse in the United States.

However, cases of fentanyl-related harm, overdose, and death in the U.S. are linked to illegally made fentanyl. It is sold through illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect. It is often mixed with heroin, other drugs or sold as a counterfeit prescription opioid pill —with or without the user's knowledge. Street fentanyl can be in the form of white, gray, or tan powder, dropped on blotter paper, eye dropper or nasal sprays.

We are encouraging the medical community, other community partners, family and friends, and people who suffer from opioid addiction to be aware of the increase in overdoses. There are actions that can be taken to reduce the risk of someone overdosing.

- Using illicit opioids, such as heroin and fentanyl increases the risk of overdosing. There is no safe way to use illicit opioids such as heroin or fentanyl, but precautions can be taken that may help reduce the risk. The street drug supply has always been unpredictable and inconsistent. Assume overdose risk no matter what drug you are using.
- Abstaining from drug use is the best way to eliminate the risk of overdose. Ask the person about their willingness to begin medication-assisted treatment or drug treatment. A list of resources can be found on the Oregon Recovers website <https://oregonrecoverynetwork.org/>. Call the SAMHSA's National Helpline 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. The Jackson County Syringe

## Please print the Reporting Guidelines



- Exchange Program provides referrals for medication-assisted treatment or drug treatment to people who utilize the program's services.
- It is critical to call 911 when someone is overdosing from opioids. If you use naloxone, the effects are temporary, and the person still needs medical attention. After the medication wears off, the person could fall back into a coma. If you call 911 for someone having a drug overdose, Oregon's Good Samaritan Law protects you from being arrested or prosecuted for drug-related charges or parole/probation violations based on information provided to emergency responders. If someone is overdosing from using fentanyl, it may take more naloxone to reverse the overdose. It can take about 2-3 minutes for the naloxone to take effect.
  - Even people who haven't used in a while may relapse and are at increased risk of overdosing. It is important to be aware of your tolerance and always use less.
  - Have an overdose plan, make sure someone can get to you when you use it, and it is safest to use when you are with someone you trust. Smoking or snorting illicit opioids may help reduce the risk. A person can still overdose by using these methods, especially with fentanyl. Always assume there is a risk of overdosing.
  - **BE PREPARED. GET NALOXONE. SAVE A LIFE.** Even if you do not use illicit opioids, but you know someone who does, you will want to carry naloxone in case you are in the position to use it on someone. Oregon law allows lay people to carry and use naloxone on others. You can get naloxone through these avenues:
    - Any pharmacist in Oregon can prescribe naloxone to you. You do not need a prescription in Oregon to access naloxone through a pharmacy. List of [Oregon pharmacies distributing naloxone](#).
    - Anyone who can prescribe medication can send a naloxone prescription to your pharmacy.
    - People who utilize the Syringe Exchange Program can receive free naloxone.
    - Free naloxone is available through Max's Mission and HIV Alliance.
    - Max's Mission is holding a naloxone distribution event at Hawthorne Park, Thursday, March 4, 2021, from 2-4 pm.
  - It is important not to mix drugs because drugs taken together can interact in ways that increase their overall effect and increase the risk of overdosing.

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*The Mission of Jackson County Health and Human Services is to plan, coordinate and provide public services that protect and promote the health and well-being of county residents.*