

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ADVISORY
Increased Risk of Accidental Fentanyl Exposure from Misidentified Drugs
Guidance for First Responders on Safe Handling of Powdered Fentanyl

August 8, 2026

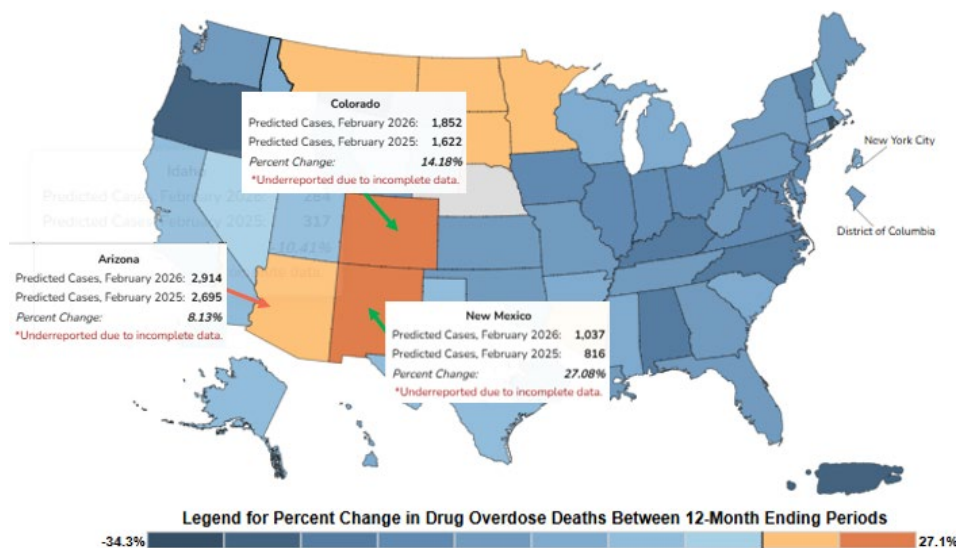
Background:

- Fentanyl is being misidentified and sold as methamphetamine or cocaine and vice versa.
- Powdered fentanyl currently circulating in New Mexico often looks nearly identical to powdered stimulants. Individuals who intend to use methamphetamine or cocaine may unintentionally use fentanyl, resulting in opioid overdose.
- Recent drug checking and crime lab data continue to show high variability in fentanyl potency, cross-contamination of fentanyl with other drugs, and presence of adulterants including xylazine and medetomidine. These compounds complicate clinical presentations and increase the risk of prolonged sedation and severe withdrawal.
- EMS and first responders are increasingly encountering powdered fentanyl at scenes. Current evidence confirms that touching powdered fentanyl will not cause an overdose and risk of inhalation in the field is extremely low.

New Mexico (NM) currently ranks **fourth highest in the nation** for drug overdose deaths rates. (Source: [CDC WONDER](#)). NM is one of 7 states experiencing an increase. Although this data is still provisional and may change as reporting is finalized, NM is currently experiencing the **largest increase among the seven U.S. states with rising overdose deaths with a 27.08% increase** from February 2025 to February 2026 (Source: [Products - Vital Statistics Rapid Release - Provisional Drug Overdose Data](#)) NM's overdoses continue to be driven by fentanyl and methamphetamine, often in combination.

Drug supply monitoring programs in New Mexico continue to detect:

- Large fluctuations in fentanyl potency, including batches far stronger or weaker than expected.
- Presence of sedatives such as xylazine or medetomidine.
 - The sedation caused by these substances is not reversed by naloxone, but these substances are almost always associated with fentanyl.
 - Fentanyl containing these adulterants is being sold as “top shelf” or “high quality.”



Recommendations for Clinicians:

Mix-ups and misidentification within the illicit drug supply contribute to overdoses and deaths. Because powdered fentanyl cannot be reliably distinguished by appearance from methamphetamine, cocaine, and other powdered drugs, individuals may unknowingly use fentanyl when they believe they are using another substance. Providers should discuss overdose prevention, drug-checking, and harm reduction with anyone using street-sourced drugs, including people who report stimulant use, opioid use, or polysubstance use.

Overdose Safety & Naloxone

- Provide naloxone to anyone using street sourced substances, regardless of their reported drug type. Fentanyl contamination is common in stimulant powders.
- Resources for free Naloxone include:
 - Call NMDOH Nurse Helpline at 1-833-796-8773
 - Free mail ordered Narcan: [NMDOH Harm Reduction | Naloxone Saves Lives](#)
 - Pharmacies: Available over the counter and by prescription
- For overdose recognition and response trainings as a resource for staff or community partners, email DOHOD.Prev@doh.nm.gov for more information or to schedule a training.

Patient Counseling & Harm Reduction

- Counsel patients to start with a small amount (“start low, go slow”) due to unpredictable potency.
- Encourage patients to avoid using alone and to have naloxone readily available.
- Encourage patients to avoid using multiple different substances at one time.
- Reassure patients that powdered fentanyl cannot cause overdose through skin contact.

Linkage to Treatment

- Offer to refer for Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) including buprenorphine available at NMDOH Public Health Offices at little or no cost.
- Provide information about statewide MOUD provider directories.
 - Statewide MOUD Directory: [A Dose of Reality](#)
 - New Mexico Pathways Medication Assisted [Treatment Locator](#)
 - Call NMDOH Nurse Helpline at 1-833-796-8773

Adulterant Checking

- Encourage patients to have their substances tested through the NMHealth Adulterant Checking Program in available locations: [Adulterant Checking-NMDOH Harm Reduction](#) or for more information, call NMDOH Nurse Helpline at 1-833-796-8773.
- Strongly recommend using fentanyl test strips on all powders including substances sold as methamphetamine or cocaine. Currently, powdered fentanyl looks very similar to powdered cocaine and methamphetamine.

Clinical considerations and recognition of adulterants

- Adulterants such as xylazine and medetomidine continue to be detected in illicit fentanyl samples.
- Providers should consider adulterant exposure when users present with symptoms of opioid overdose but have prolonged sedation or incomplete response after naloxone (For additional guidance see 5/13/2026 [HAN, Emergence of Medetomidine in illicit drug supply: Increased risk for overdose and severe withdrawal](#))

- Naloxone will reverse fentanyl induced respiratory depression, but co-exposure to sedatives such as xylazine or medetomidine may lead to persistent decreased consciousness despite adequate ventilation. Patients should be monitored until mental status returns to baseline.
- Adulterant exposure may present with:
 - Atypical overdose symptoms
 - Prolonged sedation after naloxone
 - Severe withdrawal syndromes
 - Increased medical instability

Linkage to Treatment

- Offer to refer for Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) including buprenorphine available at NMDOH Public Health Offices at little or no cost.
- Provide information about statewide MOUD provider directories.
 - Statewide MOUD Directory: [A Dose of Reality](#)
 - New Mexico Pathways Medication Assisted Treatment Locator: [PathwaysNM.org](#)
 - Call NMDOH Nurse Helpline at 1-833-796-8773

Recommendations for EMS & First Responders

- EMS and first responders are increasingly encountering powdered fentanyl at scenes, raising concerns about “touch fentanyl.”
- Current scientific evidence confirms **that touching powdered fentanyl or a pill will NOT cause an overdose**, and risk of inhalation during routine field work is extremely low.

Occupational Safety

- Touching powdered fentanyl does not cause overdose; reassure responders.
- Use nitrile gloves for routine handling.
- For routine occupational work, no respiratory PPE is needed
- In unusual circumstances where the powder is visibly airborne, consider utilizing N95 respirators

Post-Exposure

- Wash exposed skin with soap and water
- No special decontamination or hand sanitizer is required. Hand sanitizer protects you from germs, not chemicals.

Good Samaritan law

Under state law (NMSA 1978, § 24-10-3), any layperson or off-duty medical professional who renders emergency, good-faith care is shielded from civil damages for their actions or omissions. New Mexico Good Samaritan law also protects both the person experiencing an overdose and the person calling for emergency help from arrest and prosecution for minor drug-related offenses (like possession of small amounts of drugs or paraphernalia). **To qualify for immunity, the caller must provide their real name to 911 and remain at the scene until help arrives.**

Additional Resources:

Overdose & Drug Supply Information

- **NMDOH Fentanyl Facts:** <https://nmhealth.org/about/erd/ibeb/pos/awnm/ff/>
- **NMDOH Overdose Recognition and Response Training:** E-mail DOHOD.Prev@doh.nm.gov for more information or to schedule a training.
- **CDC Naloxone Guidance:** <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/caring/naloxone.html>
- **New Mexico Department of Health. Harm Reduction Fentanyl FAQ.** <https://www.nmharmreduction.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Fentanyl-FAQ.pdf>
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse. Fentanyl.** <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/fentanyl>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/stop-overdose/caring/naloxone.html>

Occupational Safety Information for Emergency Responders

- **American College of Medical Toxicology (ACMT) and American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT) Position Statement:** Preventing Occupational Fentanyl and Fentanyl Analog Exposure to Emergency Responders. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5711758/>
- **Fentanyl: Emergency Responders at Risk** <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/fentanyl/risk.htm>
Practical, evidence-based resource from CDC/NIOSH outlining how to prevent exposures and respond safely during fentanyl exposure incidents.
- **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Fentanyl: Emergency Responders Toolkit** <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/substance-use/fentanyl-toolkit-emergency-responders/index.html>
- **New Mexico Department of Health Occupational Health Surveillance Program** <https://www.nmhealth.org/about/erd/eheb/ohsp/>
This resource explains New Mexico's requirement for healthcare providers to report work related injuries or illnesses within 24 hours and provides required forms and contacts

New Mexico Health Alert Network: To register for the NM Health Alert Network, please visit the following site <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjZ/10b2> Please fill out the registration form completely and click Submit at the bottom of the page, to begin receiving Important health alerts, advisories, and updates.

Please Note that our system also utilizes text messaging to notify members of important health information. Due to FCC Regulation changes that are designed to decrease the amount of unwanted spam text messages sent each year to citizens, please save, this phone number **(855) 596-1810** as the “New Mexico Health Alert Network” default phone number for your account used for text messages on the mobile device(s) you register with us.