



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

January 9, 2024

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**SUBJECT: FIRE, POLICE, AND MEDSTAR STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING FENTANYL ABUSE**

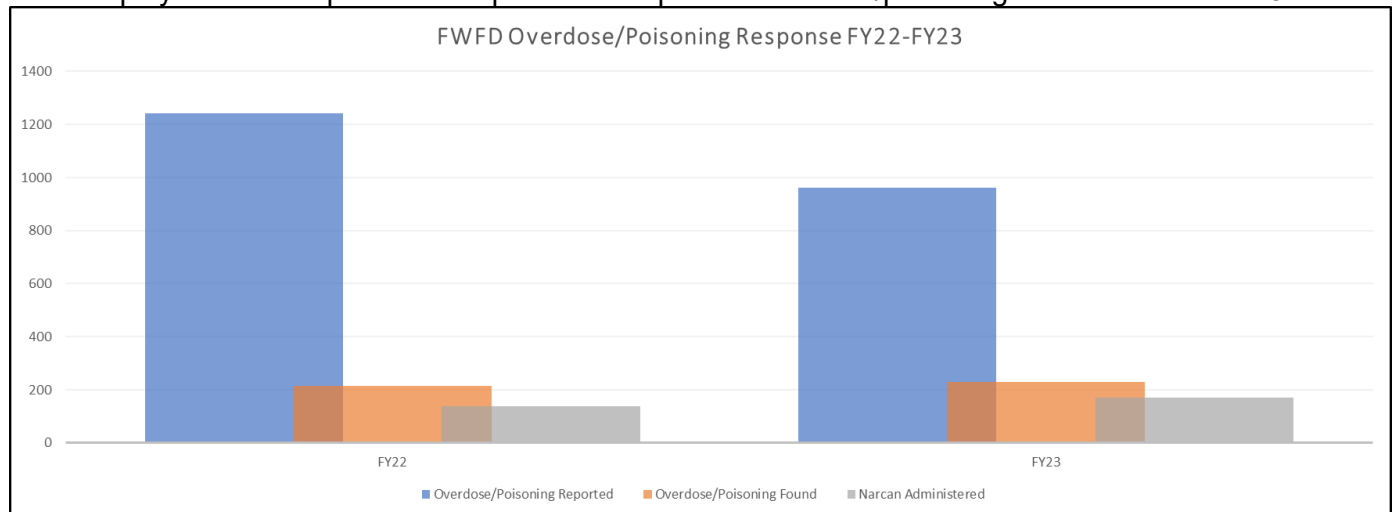
The purpose of this Informal Report is to provide information about fentanyl, emergency response to suspected fentanyl overdoses and strategies within the City of Fort Worth to reduce the abuse of fentanyl.

What is Fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. It is a major contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses in the U.S. There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illegally made fentanyl. Both are considered synthetic opioids. Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain, especially after surgery and for advanced-stage cancer. However, most recent cases of fentanyl-related overdose are linked to illegally made fentanyl, which is distributed through illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect. It is often added to other drugs because of its extreme potency, which makes drugs cheaper, more powerful, more addictive, and more dangerous. Illegally made fentanyl (IMF) is available on the drug market in different forms, including liquid and powder. Powdered fentanyl looks just like many other drugs. It is commonly mixed with drugs like heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine and made into pills that are made to resemble other prescription opioids. Fentanyl-laced drugs are extremely dangerous, and many people may be unaware that their drugs are laced with fentanyl. In its liquid form, IMF can be found in nasal sprays, eye drops, and dropped onto paper or small candies. Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids are the most common drugs involved in overdose deaths. Even in small doses, it can be deadly. Over 150 people die every day from overdoses related to synthetic opioids like fentanyl ([Fentanyl Facts \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/fentanyl-facts.html)).

Fort Worth Fire Department

The Fort Worth Fire Department responded to approximately 1,000 suspected overdose/poisoning incidents each year in FY22 and FY23. Upon arrival, firefighters discovered an actual overdose or poisoning approximately 20% of the time. The fire department does not have a specific fentanyl incident type. However, the use of Naloxone (Narcan) would only be used in an opiate type overdose, which would include fentanyl. Naloxone is a medication that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose. The following chart displays the fire department response to suspected overdose/poisoning incidents in FY22-23.



Narcan was administered in 65% of suspected overdose incidents in FY22 and 75% of suspected overdose incidents in FY23. The Fort Worth Fire Department recently received grant funding through



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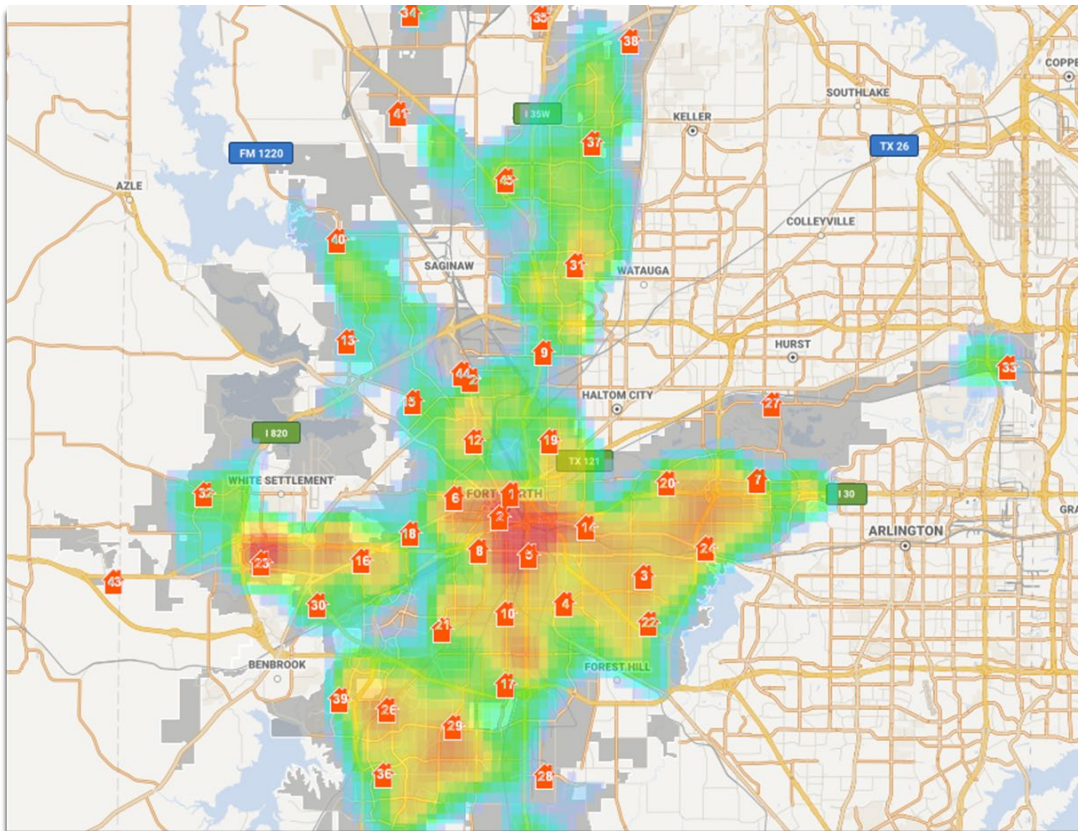
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Neighborhood Services (M&C 23-1051) along with UNT Health Science Center and Tarrant County MHMR for the purpose of mitigating harms caused by opioid distribution and use. FWFD will collaborate with these groups, along with FWPD and MedStar, in FY24 to reduce the abuse of fentanyl and other opioid substances. The following initiatives are planned:

- Community CPR training
- Community Narcan administration training
- Engagement with family members
- Distributing hygiene kits
- HOPE Team overdose follow-up within 24-36 hours
- HOPE Team risk assessment and crisis intervention to affected populations

The following heat map displays the density of incidents related to suspected overdose and poisoning. Based on this information, the above initiatives will be targeted to the Lancaster area near downtown and the Las Vegas Trail area.

**FWFD Density Map of Suspected Overdose/Poisoning Incidents FY22-FY23**



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The Fort Worth Police Department has taken a proactive approach to the fentanyl crisis. The police department's response to the fentanyl epidemic has not only targeted enforcement but also the preservation of life. In 2017, the police department started training and issuing officers Narcan to be used in the field to protect officers and citizens alike from opioid exposures and suspected overdoses. Since the inception of this program, 412 officers and civilians have been trained in the use of Naloxone (Narcan), with 357 doses of Narcan currently issued and assigned to officers. 22 of those doses have been administered as a life-saving measure in the field. After an officer utilizes a one-time dosage unit of Narcan they will be issued a replacement.

In 2022 the Fort Worth Police Department created a team of narcotics investigators that is devoted to suspected overdose and death investigation from drugs, including but not limited to fentanyl. This team works closely with the Tarrant District Attorney's Office, the United States Attorney's Office, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

These narcotics investigators are notified by Police Communications when patrol officers have been dispatched to a call involving a suspected fentanyl overdose. The team is structured for a 24/7 response. Year to date, the team has responded to 98 overdose-related calls and 76 of those were fentanyl-related overdose deaths. The team must respond as soon as possible to preserve evidence that would assist in developing leads toward locating the person or persons who supplied the deceased with the deadly drug.

Year to date, the team has made 44 arrests of persons related to fentanyl death investigations. The arrested persons will typically be charged with a lesser included charge until the Fort Worth Police Crime Lab and the Medical Examiner's Office can complete their reports that would indicate the deceased died as a result of a fentanyl overdose. House Bill 6 was signed into law in Texas in April 2023 and as of September 1, 2023, HB6 allows for the prosecutor to raise the initial charge of possession of narcotics to Murder for someone who supplied fentanyl to a person who later died from an overdose. Earlier this month, the Fort Worth Police Department was one of the first in the state of Texas and the first agency in Tarrant County to indict someone for a murder charge from a fentanyl overdose.

This team has also taken the initiative to begin educating school teachers, administrators, and counselors on how to recognize dangerous drugs including fentanyl as well as the dangers associated with them.

MedStar

MedStar's overdose response team is grant funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) in partnership with Recovery Resource Council. Recovery Resource Council is a non-profit with a mission to promote wellness and recovery from disorders relating to alcohol, substance abuse, trauma and mental health. The team is comprised of one mobile health paramedic and one peer support specialist from Recovery Resource Council. A brief overview of their actions follows:

- 3,168 referrals between December 2021 and October 2023.
  - A referral is anyone that has called 911 and has demonstrated substance use disorder.
  - 28.3% of referrals are opiate related.
  - 558 referrals were 'ineligible' due to no physical location.

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- 250 patients agreed to all program services during that period.
- 373 patients received at least one program service during that period.
  - 222 were connected to a peer support specialist.
  - 249 families received hands-only CPR training.
  - 268 were provided naloxone kits.
  - 224 had a health and wellness screening completed.
- 90 average visits per month in 2023

**Summary**

Fentanyl currently accounts for the vast majority of all opioid overdoses and almost 70% of all drug overdose deaths. Its impact on overdose deaths and prevalence in street drugs other than opioids has led many in the field to refer to fentanyl as the Fourth Wave of the Opioid Epidemic. General strategies that have been used to address other waves of opioid epidemic can be adapted to address the presence of fentanyl in the drug supply and include multi-disciplinary efforts focused on prevention, harm reduction, drug testing, expanded treatment centers, and increased data collection and research. City departments including Fire, Police, and Neighborhood Services will continue to work with outside resources including, but not limited to, MedStar, Recovery Resource Council, Tarrant County MHMR, and UNT Health Science Center to reduce fentanyl and opioid abuse in the City of Fort Worth.

For questions regarding this information, please contact Jim Davis, Fire Chief at [Jim.Davis@fortworthtexas.gov](mailto:Jim.Davis@fortworthtexas.gov) or Neil Noakes, Police Chief at [Neil.Noakes@fortworthtexas.gov](mailto:Neil.Noakes@fortworthtexas.gov).

**David Cooke**  
**City Manager**