EXPOSURE TO FENTANYL CONTAMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

For medical purposes, fentanyl is an opioid medication prescribed to treat pain. Illicit fentanyl includes fentanyl that is illegally manufactured as well as fentanyl that is legally manufactured and used in an unapproved manner. Illicit fentanyl is sometimes mixed with other drugs like oxycodone, cocaine, and methamphetamine. It can be in pill, powder, or liquid form. It can be smoked, snorted, injected, and taken by mouth. Illicit fentanyl use can result in overdose.

Workplace Exposures

Workplaces that are open to the public may have surfaces contaminated with fentanyl if people have used fentanyl there.

Some examples of workplaces that may have fentanyl contamination include:

- Public bathrooms
- Restaurants, convenience stores, or gas stations
- Public libraries
- Housing facilities including emergency shelters and temporary, transitional, or permanent supportive housing
- Social service agencies
- Public transit
- Hotels and motels

Exposure to leftover fentanyl can occur if an employee disturbs items left behind by users. Work activities that can disturb leftover fentanyl include handling contaminated items or cleaning in areas where fentanyl was used. During those activities, there is a risk of exposure by:

- Breathing in fentanyl powder
- Touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have touched fentanyl

Hazards from Exposure to Fentanyl Contamination

If employees are exposed to leftover fentanyl in the workplace, they should seek medical attention if they experience any of the following symptoms:

- Shallow or slow breathing
- Drowsiness or loss of consciousness
- Constricted or pinpoint pupils

Based on current information, it is unlikely for overdose to occur just from being around or helping someone who has smoked or used fentanyl. However, researchers are still studying the risks from exposure to fentanyl residue left behind by users. The Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) is tracking this closely and will provide additional information as it becomes available.

If employees discover evidence of drug use in the workplace, they may experience emotional distress. Training employees on how to prepare for and handle this situation may help reduce stress and anxiety.

Employer Requirements & Policies

Employers are required to provide a safe and healthy workplace. If employees are exposed to fentanyl contamination at work, employers must:

- Address the hazard in the organization's Accident Prevention Program (APP) by including the following:
  - Procedures to prevent drug use in the workplace
  - Instructions for employees if they find drugs or drug-related items, such as calling law enforcement and making sure items are not disturbed
  - Who is responsible for cleaning contaminated spaces
  - Procedures for cleaning, if done in-house
- Include the hazard in the organization's personal protective equipment (PPE) hazard assessment
  - Provide PPE, where applicable
- Ensure training is provided to employees who clean up spaces or items contaminated with fentanyl, including knowing the signs and symptoms of fentanyl intoxication
- Ensure compliance with the Chemical Hazard Communication standard for any chemicals used during the cleanup of fentanyl
- Ensure compliance with the Bloodborne Pathogens standard if syringes or needles are present

Employers can visit L&I's consultation information page to request a no-fee consultation to help address fentanyl exposures in their workplace. Visit lni.wa.gov/Consultation for more information.

For more information on how to stay safe from fentanyl exposure at work, please visit lni.wa.gov/FentanylSafety

NOTE:
This fact sheet does not address the following situations:

- Workplace exposure to fentanyl at contaminated sites where fentanyl is illegally stored, pressed, or produced (referred to as clandestine drug labs)
- Exposure to pharmaceutical fentanyl during legal manufacture or use

Washington State Department of HEALTH

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

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