



First Responder Safety

Precautions for Dealing with Unknown Opioids

First responders may encounter substances that contain unknown opioids, such as heroin, morphine, fentanyl and carfentanil. Carfentanil and other fentanyl-related compounds pose a serious threat to public safety, first responder, medical and laboratory personnel. These substances, which are 50 to 100 times more potent than heroin, come in several forms, including powder and liquid. They can be absorbed through the skin or through accidental inhalation of airborne powder and can quickly result in life-threatening respiratory depression. Never handle fentanyl or its analogues without the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Precautions for All First Responders

- Avoid handling of any substances or paraphernalia if possible
- Assume all unknown powdered drugs may contain fentanyl and/or its analogs
- Minimize exposure opportunities by covering bare skin
- Immediately use soap and water to thoroughly clean contaminated skin
- Do not use hand sanitizers or bleach solution to clean contaminated skin
- Notify everyone in proximity that a dangerous drug may be present
- Do not taste, touch, or sniff suspected drugs of any kind
- If alone, notify dispatch to ensure your safety is monitored
- Ensure naloxone is immediately available for use when there are potential exposures
- Perform risk assessments on every scene to determine exposure risks

Opioid Exposure Risk Assessment			
Situation	Powder Presence	Threat Level	PPE Recommended*
Carfentanil or other fentanyl-related compounds potentially or confirmed present at scene or with patient	No Visible Powder Present	Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable nitrile gloves¹
	Small Amount Visible Powder Present	Moderate Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable nitrile gloves¹ • Safety goggles or glasses for eye protection • Disposable filtering facepiece respirator (“mask”) rated to P100² • Wrist/arm protection³
	Liquid Fentanyl or Large Amount Visible Powder Present	High Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable nitrile gloves¹ (double or use thicker gloves) • Safety goggles or glasses for eye protection • Half or full-facepiece APR with P100 filters⁴ • Particulate hazards protective ensemble (garments, gloves, and footwear) certified to NFPA 1999 Single or Multi-Use or NFPA 1994 Class 4 Ensemble
<p>* The threat level initially selected can change and PPE should be adjusted accordingly.</p> <p>1. Nitrile gloves should be a minimum 5 mil thickness and powder-free. Consider double gloving as an additional precaution if appropriate. Replace gloves immediately if torn or after 30-60 minutes of use. Dark gloves may allow better visualization of any drug powder residue.</p> <p>2. If P100 filtering facepiece is not available, R100 or N100 should be utilized.</p> <p>3. Wrist/arm protection may include: on-duty uniform with sleeves, sleeve covers, gowns, or coveralls.</p> <p>4. Air-purifying respirator (APR); must be medically cleared, trained, and fit-tested for respirator use.</p>			

References:
 National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). *Preventing Occupational Exposure to Emergency Responders*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/fentanyl/risk.html>
 Indiana State Department of Health. *Responder Precautions for Unknown Opioids*.
<https://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/health/first-responder-precautions-unkn.pdf>