



### Rainbow Fentanyl

A dangerous new version of a drug has become popular on the street. Rainbow fentanyl is a brightly colored powdered version of the toxic opioid that is extremely addictive and deadly.

This new concoction is also available in multi-colored fentanyl pills that look like SweeTarts. The pills come in a variety of bright colors, shapes, and sizes potentially making them more attractive to children and young people.



The Drug Enforcement Administration has been warning the public about this new street drug version of fentanyl because it so often resembles candy. Employees who

are parents need to be aware of this new fentanyl form because of the serious risks to children. The goal of this *Employee Education Newsletter* is to raise awareness of this issue in order to decrease the number of lives impacted by hundreds of daily fatal overdoses.

The "word on the street" and on social media claims that certain colors of rainbow fentanyl are stronger or weaker than others, but there is no indication through DEA's laboratory testing that this is true. Every color, shape and size of these pills should be considered extremely dangerous.

More than 150 people die every day from overdoses related to fentanyl. The drug is one hundred times more potent than morphine and fifty times stronger than heroin. Drug-involved overdose deaths, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids, are among the most serious problems facing our families, communities, and workplaces.

### Why do People use Fentanyl?

Fentanyl may be prescribed by a doctor to treat extreme pain after surgery or to help with chronic pain management conditions like advanced-stage cancer. It can be a highly addictive drug, so it is usually only prescribed to patients who do not receive a therapeutic response from other painkillers. Medical professionals know that fentanyl should never be used for short-term pain due to it being so addictive.

## Where does Fentanyl Come From?

China is the primary source of illicit fentanyl, and there are thousands of labs making pure fentanyl as well as the source of ingredients or precursors needed to manufacture the drug. Drug dealers make fentanyl in the form of fake pills as a marketing tactic. They mix fentanyl with other ingredients to manufacture a cheaper substance, often creating an even more deadly drug. The strong potency of fentanyl along with the combination of other substances can quickly result in an accidental overdose and unexpected death.

Even in very small doses, these drug combinations can be deadly. An added challenge is that there are many chemical variations of fentanyl, commonly referred to as analogues. There are about 30 known fentanyl analogues, but currently, only 19 of these analogues are controlled substances under Federal law.

Fentanyl comes in many forms, including powder, pills, capsules, liquid, a nasal spray, skin patches, or sometimes as a lollipop or tablet that dissolves like a cough drop. It is difficult to differentiate powdered fentanyl from other substances; therefore, it can be ingested unknowingly if mixed with other drugs, to include cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, and meth. Mixing drugs is never safe because the effects from combining drugs are more unrecognizable and unpredictable than use of an individual drug.

## The Fentanyl Crisis

Fentanyl abuse has developed into a full-blown crisis in our country, and this crisis

is exceptionally dangerous because of fentanyl's high potency and the speed with which it reaches the brain. Just two milligrams of the drug can kill, whether swallowed, inhaled, or absorbed through the skin.

Those suffering from an overdose involving fentanyl may require both higher doses and multiple administrations of naloxone to reverse the overdose and to become stabilized. Even the police and first responders are at risk from inadvertently touching or inhaling fentanyl powder at a crime scene or while helping an overdose victim.

## Combating the Problem

Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat facing America. An overwhelming percentage of drug overdose deaths that occur daily are a result of synthetic opioids like fentanyl. It is important then for employees to be on the lookout for fentanyl, to include the newer trend of rainbow-colored fentanyl, and to understand its highly toxic and deadly nature.

The increase in fentanyl overdose deaths nationwide highlights the need to expand

1. drug-free workplace programs,
2. overdose prevention information and education,
3. availability of substance use treatment, and
4. awareness of effective overdose response methods.

For more information, visit the CDC Fentanyl information page: <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/fentanyl.html>



# Supervisor Newsletter

## Impaired Employees

Numerous workplace research studies previously cited in these *Supervisor Training Newsletters* have shown that substance abuse can negatively impact an employee's safety, productivity, work ethic, decision-making skills, communication skills, and attitude with management and coworkers.

Helping an employee who is struggling with addiction can be difficult for supervisors. Showing compassion while staying within professional and legal boundaries is not always an easy thing to do. But if an employee arrives at work under the influence of alcohol or drugs, action must of course be taken.

An impaired employee creates a risk to himself, his coworkers, and the general safety and comfort of the workplace. A substance-abusing worker can bring legal and financial harm to the company, as well as emotional, mental, and physical damage to other employees. A substance use disorder can also adversely impact an employee's work performance even if he or she is not using substances while at work or arriving intoxicated.

## Replacement or Rehabilitation?

It might seem that the easiest thing to do would be to fire an addicted employee. But a good employee who is going through a challenging time can be difficult to replace. It is often more cost-effective and efficient to support a valued employee through addiction treatment than to hire and train someone new. According to research conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), salaried employee replacement costs can be as high as 50%-60% of salary with overall costs ranging anywhere from 90%-200%. An employee earning \$60,000 per year then could cost the company an average of \$30,000-\$45,000 to replace, and roughly \$54,000-\$120,000 in overall losses to the company.

In addition to the financial loss that occurs from firing an addicted employee, there might be a legal obligation to treat alcoholism or drug addiction as a protected disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (as previously discussed in *Supervisor Training Newsletters*).

## Document, Document, Document!

Regardless of the employment action that will ultimately be taken,

it's important for supervisors to carefully document behaviors and situations when it is clear that an employee is struggling with a substance abuse problem. This may include highlighting the employee's absences and/or tardiness, physical appearance, and behavior toward coworkers, customers, and upper management. Presenting observations to support a supervisor's claims and concerns can have a significant impact on the denial that often accompanies a substance abuse problem and could be the catalyst that gets the employee to accept help.

When deciding on what course of action should be taken however, supervisors should keep in mind that many of the signs associated with drug and alcohol addiction could also be signs of other health concerns. It's also important to be professional and careful when sharing documented observations so that an intervention doesn't turn into a confrontation. The ability to listen and give the employee the benefit of the doubt can go a long way.

### **The Value of EAP**

If an employee admits to substance abuse and demonstrates a willingness to seek help, one of the first steps includes a proper substance use disorder assessment. An EAP (Employee Assistance Program) professional can

conduct an assessment and assist the employee in finding legitimate means for treatment and recovery. Just as importantly, they can ensure that it is done in a way that preserves the workforce, the company's reputation, and the supervisor's relationship with the employee.

Providing a troubled employee with the help they need to restore their professional and personal life is not only the right thing to do, it is often the best legal option. It's important then for supervisors to be aware of the resources that are available. Many businesses offer health insurance to their employees, but supervisors might not realize that the company's health insurance plan also includes EAP services.

The employee also may not realize that their workplace health insurance offers treatment coverage. Treatment doesn't have to be, and should not be expensive, especially when an employee is already potentially in debt or at the risk of completely losing their wages. Options such as outpatient versus inpatient treatment can reduce costs while still providing the support necessary for successful treatment. As a part of the intervention, supervisors should give employees the opportunity to review the options available under the company's insurance plan.