

Healthy Happenings

Fentanyl Awareness in Our Community

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Substance use is a part of our lives as human beings. Drugs and alcohol have been used in ceremony, religion, and family gatherings. They can be used for medical purposes, or purely for their intoxicating effects. Some people are exposed through prescriptions, others through casual experimentation, and some in more traumatic ways. Without a doubt substance use can be complicated for us as human beings, though perhaps most often when we know and love someone who use substances in unhealthy ways. Demonizing a substance on its own can bring some problems, too. After all, some people need pain pills to function through chronic pain conditions or cancer related pain. But, we should learn the risks and how to reduce the harms of any substance exposure as even some previously positive experiences with substances can become twisted or dangerous.

With risk in mind, a new drug trend, fentanyl, is worth discussing. In the United States, deaths involving synthetic, or man-made, opioids have been increasing over the last decade. In South Eastern Utah, this trend has been especially devastating. The most common offender in overdose is fentanyl, often because people don't know they are using it or because they are unfamiliar with how powerful this pain killer can be. So, what is fentanyl? Fentanyl is an opioid 50-100 times more potent than morphine, meaning overdoses can happen quickly and can be harder to treat. Fentanyl comes in many forms, liquid solution, patch, lozenge/lollipop, or pill, and is often prescribed by medical professionals. But, it can be made outside of pharmaceutical labs, as well, and sold illicitly. These illicit types of fentanyl can be harder to detect as they are often manufactured as a powder and pressed into pills, masquerading as other medications like Adderall or Percocet. Some drug dealers mix fentanyl into methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, MDMA, or other substances to increase the intoxication experience and cut costs, and certainly without telling their customers. In 2019, roughly 21/100,000 people died from opioid overdose (about 50,000 people), up 4.3% from the year before. In SE Utah, mostly in Carbon and Emery Counties, the overdose rates have been higher than the national average, in part because prescription opioids are dispensed at higher rates here, but also because substance use can take advantage of low resource communities at a disproportionate rate. Opioids like pain pills and heroin have been in the Moab community for a long time, but it is notable that Moab has not suffered as many opioid related overdoses as our neighbors to the north and south. Now things have changed-

fentanyl is moving into our community at a fast pace over the last few months in particular. This means Moab is at risk of seeing more fentanyl related overdoses and deaths and we should try and be prepared.

Opioid overdose risks are real. Even if you have been taking pain pills from your doctor for many years, it is important to be able to identify what an overdose looks like. Opioids of all kinds can place drug naïve people in particular, especially children and adolescents, at increased risk. Mixing pain medications with other substances (like alcohol) or medications can increase risks of overdose, as well. Talking with your prescriber is a good place to start. Or, if you are taking drugs illicitly, starting with low doses and testing drugs for fentanyl before you use them might save your life.

Know the signs: Fentanyl, and other pain pills or heroin, can cause sedation, drowsiness, nausea, confusion, slowed breathing, and unconsciousness, and ultimately cardiac arrest from lack of oxygen. Lips can turn blue or gray and skin can be cold or clammy. Breathing can slow to the point you may hear gurgling or groaning rather than regular breaths. Ultimately breathing may stop completely.

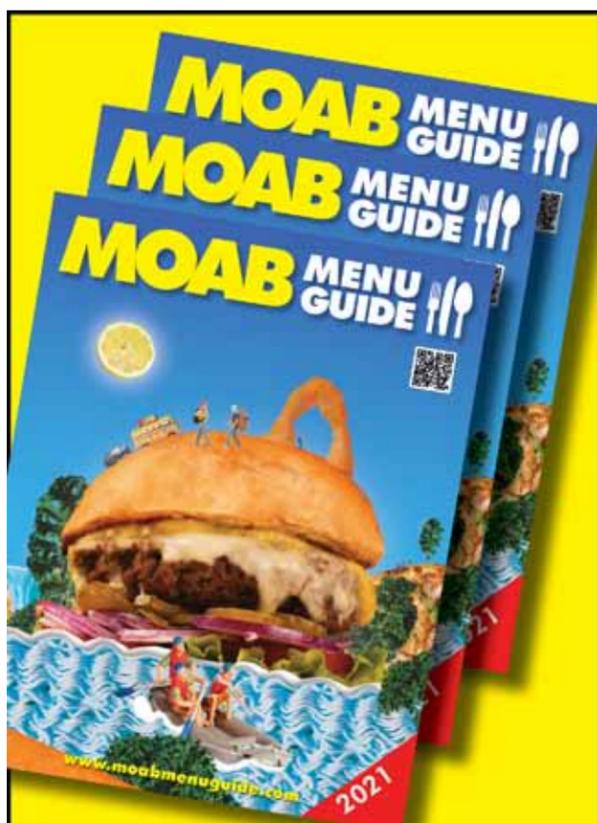
Naloxone, brand name Narcan, is a medication that is sold by pharmacies or prescribed by your doctor for opioid overdose. It is wise to have some on hand if you use opioids of any kind, either prescribed or illicitly, or if you know someone who does. In Moab, many of the new cases of fentanyl use have been seen in youth, as young as 14 or 15. The fentanyl has been reported to be intentionally added to

other drugs like marijuana, found laced into substances like methamphetamine, or is being smoked or injected directly. Even a small amount of fentanyl, the size of the tip of a pen, can cause an overdose in someone who isn't tolerant to this drug. It is also important to know that because fentanyl is so powerful, it may require higher doses of naloxone than other opioids. And, naloxone only lasts in the body about 60-90 minutes. This means getting emergency medical help is still necessary after an overdose to ensure you do not succumb to the overdose after the Narcan has worn off. For more information about Narcan, how to get it, how to use it, and additional resources I recommend visiting the website: www.utahnaloxone.org.

At the end of the day it is also worth mentioning that fentanyl addiction, like all substance use disorders, is treatable. Just like COPD, diabetes, and high blood pressure, addiction can take hold of some people given the right mix of biology, stressors and lifestyle choices. Please know we are here to give you more information and connect you or your loved ones to treatment if you're ready. Or, if you simply want to know more about the opioids you're prescribed, we are here for that too.

Be safe, Moab. And, please join us for 2 educational events to explore this substance, its risks, and how you can access support and resources:

May 4th at 6PM via Facebook live presentation from Special Agent Tinkler of DEA



MOAB MENU GUIDE
2021

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OPIOID CRISIS IN MOAB?

Is someone you love at an increased risk of overdose?

Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is 50-100 times stronger than morphine is making it's way into our community. Deadly in tiny amounts (the size of a tip of a pen), fentanyl is often laced into counterfeit pills, marijuana, and other illegal drugs without the knowledge of consumers, and because it is so potent, overdoses can happen quickly and can be more difficult to treat. While any age group can be at risk, Moab Regional Hospital has recently seen a significant increase in referrals to our addiction program for individuals under the age of 22.

Join MOAB REGIONAL HOSPITAL

for two community events to learn about the risks and signs of opioid use and how to help those you love. For more information or to register for an educational workshop, please call **435-719-3771**.

TUESDAY, MAY 4th
AT 6:00 PM

Streaming Presentation
LIVE on Facebook

THURSDAY, MAY 6th
AT 3pm, 4pm, OR 5pm

In-Person Educational Workshop
for Fentanyl Testing and Narcan Use

Co-Sponsored by UROHC, USARA, UT OPIOIDS, and SEUHD

