

Fentanyl test strip: Drug Checking FAQ for Service Providers

Interior Health supports internal staff as well as agencies and community partners to provide this service in two ways:

Take Home Drug Checking (THDC) – The THDC program is similar to the Take Home Naloxone (THN) program. The program provides training and Rapid Response fentanyl test strips (FTS) for service users to test their own substances where and when they choose.

ONSITE drug checking – service users have their drugs tested at your site with instructions and supplies provided by a trained staff person or Peer.

In both service delivery models all participating staff are required to complete an online [train the trainer course](#) to ensure they understand how to use the test strips, train others and also clearly communicate the test limitations and risks. Sites who offer drug checking services should do this in conjunction with other harm reduction and overdose prevention services (naloxone, supply distribution etc.).

Who can offer these services?

The [Criteria for Overdose Prevention Services](#) document outlines the important services and supports that should be in place for agencies looking to provide drug checking services. This includes:

- Provide a welcoming, safe and supportive environment for people who use drugs
- Embracing a harm reduction philosophy
- Able to provide overdose prevention education, take home naloxone kit training and distribution
- Capacity to respond to overdose where necessary, including proper policies and procedures
- Distribution and safe disposal of harm reduction supplies
- Knowledge and ability to refer to treatment and other health and social services

What kind of testing is done?

Whether the test is completed ONSITE or through the THDC program Rapid Response (BTNX) FTS are used. While the strips can be used post-consumption within three days of use to test for the presence of fentanyl in urine we recommend pre-consumption testing to make informed decisions around how to reduce risk of drug poisoning.

The BTNX FTS box states the test is for the detection of fentanyl in human urine, can I use this to detect fentanyl in a water/substance solution?

There is NO difference between the test strips being used to test for the presence of fentanyl in urine or through a water/substance solution.

How Is The Test Done?

A) THDC:

For each new service-user accessing the THDC program there is an expectation that the provider ensures the client knows how to do the test, interpret results and understands the limitations of the test as well as harm reduction strategies to reduce the risk of drug poisoning. Please see the online [train the trainer course](#) for more information on testing procedures. Once the client has been informed of the above they are provided with up to five strips (with instructional labels adhered) and a brochure containing testing instructions.

B) ONSITE TESTING

The client provides a very small sample of the drug (about the size of a grain of salt) into a small cup; the sample is mixed with 30ml (1 ounce) of tap water. A test strip is placed in the solution for about 10 seconds; results appear approximately 2 minutes after the test strip is removed. The entire testing process takes less than five minutes. Urine testing is also an option if the person has used drugs in the past three days – the process is similar but involves inserting the strip into a room temperature urine sample. Please see the online [train the trainer course](#) for more information on testing procedures.

Limitations of the test:

The test has some important limitations - strips only test for fentanyl within the sample provided. Fentanyl may still be present in the remainder of the drug batch. **Strips may occasionally report a negative result when fentanyl or an analogue is present.**

It is very important that the tester talk with the client about these limitations and that they understand the recommended steps to reduce their risk of drug poisoning regardless of a negative result.

What do the test results mean?

A **positive** result (indicated by the presence of **one** red line) means that fentanyl or a fentanyl analogue has been detected in the drug.

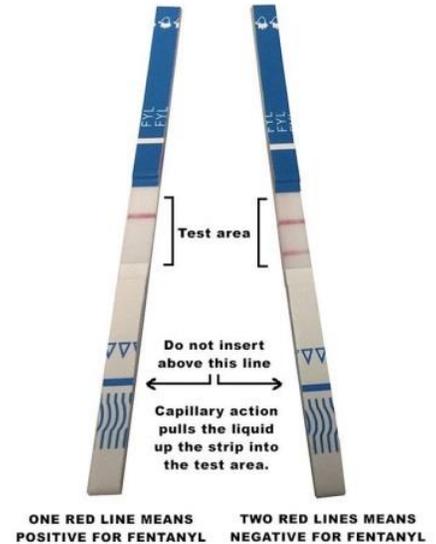
A **negative** result (**two** red lines) means that the test did not detect fentanyl or a fentanyl analogue within the sample tested. The presence of any second line, no matter how faint, is **NEGATIVE**.

**A negative result does not guarantee the drug is free from fentanyl or any of its analogues – please see limitations above.*

ONSITE TESTING: Is there a risk to staff that may be exposed to a drug in the testing process?

Our recommended process for drug checking has been developed to ensure that the service provider does not touch the substance. The risk to staff from inadvertent exposure to substances is considered very low as long as universal precautions are followed.

Disposable gloves should be used while administering care to a person who is testing their substance, when handling items left behind by the client, or when cleaning the testing area. Universal precautions, including standard sharps safety measures, should be followed as usual to prevent possible exposure to infectious agents via blood and body fluids. Wearing a mask during drug checking is not required. There is no risk to staff regarding airborne particles or any other inhalation risk during the procedure. No other personal protective equipment (PPE) is necessary under typical circumstances.



ONSITE TESTING: How should staff clean up after testing?

Staff may utilize a Cavi-wipe or related cleaner to tidy up after a drug checking encounter. Gloves should be worn if you are using Cavi-wipes as they can be very hard on the skin. The dissolved sample in water can be disposed of by pouring down the drain or flushed down the toilet.

ONSITE TESTING: If a client chooses to discard their substance(s) after the test – how do we do that?

The client can also dispose of unwanted substance in a sealed sharps container or a biomedical waste container in a secure location. If sites prefer, they can order point of care deactivation technology (Deterra pouches) from the manufacturer <https://deterrasystem.com/>. This technology uses activated charcoal to deactivate drugs by adsorbing and firmly binding to the drugs, thereby making them inactive and ineffective for misuse and allows for safe disposal.

What are the documentation/reporting requirements?

ONSITE TESTING ONLY: Data collection for ONSITE drug checking is completed through the nucleus lab system for designated staff only.

What do we need to offer this service?

THDC requires the following supplies:

- Rapid Response fentanyl test strips (FTS)
- Labels to adhere to the FTS packages

Fentanyl test strip: Drug Checking FAQ for Service Providers _April 2023

- Instructional brochures and educational/promotion material
- A private space for training those new to program

ONSITE TESTING: requires the following supplies:

- Rapid Response fentanyl test strips (FTS)
- Small disposable water cups
- Push/stir sticks
- Water source (does not need to be sterile water – tap water is ok)
- Gloves
- Private testing/training space
- Trained staff to administer test
- Educational materials for those who are taking strips with them i.e. instructional brochure

Who pays for the supplies and where can we get them?

Costs for purchasing supplies (Rapid Response FTS, instruction labels and instructional brochures) are covered through the IH drug checking program. Order forms and/or instructions are provided once your site is registered through the [Harm Reduction Coordinator](#) team. Additional supplies (small water cups, stir sticks, gloves) for ONSITE testing are not covered through Interior Health.

What steps do we need to take to become a drug testing site?

- Obtain approvals from your leadership
- Contact an [IH Harm Reduction Coordinator](#) to express interest. The regional Harm Reduction Coordinator for your area will contact you to begin the enrollment process
- Ensure access to a private and safe location for training and or testing is available

Is there an age limit for this service? Can we provide it to youth?

Canadian law (The Infants Act) states that a minor may consent to health care as long as the health care provider has explained the risks and benefits of the health care and has made reasonable efforts to determine, and has concluded that the health care is in the young person’s best interest.

Youth requesting access to harm reduction services require special consideration because of their vulnerability, their risk of exploitation and concerns about their ability to give informed consent. Service providers may have the opportunity to engage and dissuade youth from further involvement and possible entrenchment in problematic substance use. Youth who have been using drugs for a shorter period of time may be more amenable to drug prevention interventions, if they have not had access to these services before. Youth’s relative inexperience with substance use puts them at a higher risk for drug overdose and substance use related exploitation. Contact with harm reduction professionals can increase education and problem-solving ability to prevent or reduce the risk of overdose and exploitation.

Please refer to the [BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services Policy and Guidelines](#) Appendix 4: Guidelines for Providing HR Services to Mature Minors in BC for more information.

Is this activity legal?

Drug checking is considered an overdose prevention service (OPS) under the Ministerial Order No.M488. Sites offering drug checking that do not provide a safe use space do not need to be declared an OPS by the Medical Health Officer.

If a client overdoses after utilizing ONSITE testing or the THDC program – could we be liable?

Providing risk and test limitation messaging to the client is very important. Staff should never use terms like “safe” when discussing test results. If you have further questions about liability it is best to speak with your insurance provider or attorney.

How do we spread the word about this service?

You can do so however you wish – word of mouth, social media, posters, outreach etc. IH can support by posting your location on our website and providing promotional materials. You may also create your own posters etc.