

Fentanyl test strip: Drug Checking FAQ for Service Providers

Who can offer this service?

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?

The test is done using Rapid Response fentanyl test strips – testing can be done pre-consumption (testing drugs) or post consumption (urine test – within three days of consumption). We recommend pre-consumption testing to allow for opportunity to take action to prevent overdose.

How is the test done?

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 our *Drug Checking Guide for information.

*** Our Drug Checking Guide can be found on the Interior Health Harm Reduction Partners [webpage](#) – it contains additional detail to assist you through the step by step process. Please read this guide carefully and follow all the steps.**

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 strongly recommend steps be taken to prevent overdose even when the drug may test negative.

What do the test results mean?

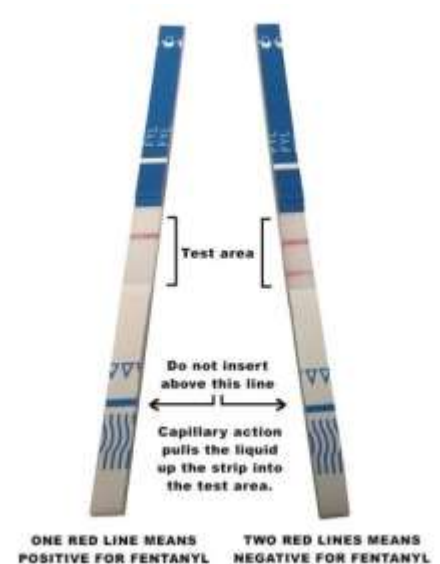
A **positive** result (indicated by the presence of one red line) means that fentanyl or a fentanyl analogue has been detected in the drug.

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.*

What are the documentation/reporting requirements?

Data collection is a requirement for all sites participating in drug checking services. The data collection requirements will vary depending on the type of site offering the service. Your Harm Reduction Coordinator can provide more information.



What is being done with the data?

Data collection is a reporting requirement due to the ongoing Public Health Overdose Emergency. Results from drug checking services are being tracked at the health authority and provincial levels and being used to identify trends, and inform service development.

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

- Obtain approvals from your leadership.
- Identify a private, safe location to offer the service
- Contact an IH Harm Reduction Coordinator harmreduction.coordinator@interiorhealth.ca to express interest and to arrange for training.
- It is strongly recommended that you inform local RCMP that you are offering the service.
- Let the IH Harm Reduction Coordinator know if you want your service listed on the website.

What do we need to offer this service?

- Rapid Response test strips
- Small disposable water cups
- Push/stir sticks
- Water source (does not need to be sterile water – tap water is ok)
- Data collection forms
- Private testing space
- Trained staff to administer test

Who pays for the supplies (strips, cups and push/stir sticks)? And where can we get them?

Service providers are responsible for paying for the strips and necessary supplies. Interior Health and providers can order test strips through the manufacturer <https://www.btnx.com/HarmReduction>. The cost of strips works out to approximately \$1 per strip.

Small plastic shot glass cups and push/stir sticks can be obtained from a variety of retailers (dollar stores etc.).

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.

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 having their drugs checked – could we be liable?

Providing risk and test limitation messaging to the client is very important – see script examples in the Drug Checking guide. 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.

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 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.

Additional information:

https://www.saswh.ca/files/Featured_Articles/Fentanyl_and_Opioids/Fin_Fentanyl%20QA_25-09-17.pdf

How should staff clean up after testing?

Instructions for cleanup can be found in the Drug Checking Guide. 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.

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.