

FENTANYL TEST STRIPS: HOW TO USE THEM

Test First. Know What's in Your Supply. Stay Safer.

HARM REDUCTION GUIDE • STEP-BY-STEP • 2026

Life Force Harm Reduction | Get Home Safe | Boston, Massachusetts

WHY THIS MATTERS

You can’t see, smell, or taste fentanyl

90%

of opioid-related overdose deaths in Massachusetts in 2023 involved fentanyl

Among deaths with a toxicology screen. Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

It hides in other drugs

Fentanyl turns up in pills, powders, and drugs people don’t expect, like cocaine and meth. You can’t tell by looking.

A quick test can change your plan

A strip shows whether fentanyl is present, so you can skip it, go slower, use with someone, and keep naloxone close.

BEFORE YOU START

What you'll need

Use a fresh, in-date strip. Never use one that is expired or has been tampered with.

Fentanyl test strip

One new strip for every test. Check the expiry date first.

Your sample

A small amount of the drug, or the residue left in a baggie or cooker.

Container & spoon

A bottle cap or small cup, plus something clean to stir with.

Clean water

About 1 teaspoon (5 mL) for a typical test. Your strip's directions say how much.

A timer

Your phone works. You'll time the dip and the wait.

Good light

A bright light makes a faint line much easier to see.

STEPS 1–2: PREPARE

Prepare your sample and add water

STEP 1

Crush & mix

Crush pills, crystals, and chunks into a fine powder, then mix. Fentanyl can clump unevenly, so test as much of a pill as you can.

STEP 2

Add the right water

Meth, cocaine, or MDMA: 5 mL (1 tsp) of water per 10 mg of powder. Other drugs: 5 mL per 50 mg. Stir until fully dissolved.

OR: TESTING RESIDUE

Rinse the leftovers

Add about 1 mL of water to the cooker or baggie, then go straight to the dip.

Directions vary by brand and program. Follow the instructions that come with your strips. Not sure what 10 mg looks like? It’s roughly enough powder to cover Lincoln’s hair on a penny.

Sources: NYS Department of Health; SUNY Oneonta; Rummler HOPE Network.

STEPS 3–4: DIP AND WAIT

Dip the strip, then lay it flat

STEP 3

Hold the blue end

Pinch the strip by the blue end. The other end is the one that goes into your liquid.

STEP 3

Dip to the line

Place the strip in the liquid, no higher than the blue line, for about 15 seconds while the liquid travels up.

STEP 4

Lay flat and wait

Set the strip on a flat surface and start a timer. Wait about 3 minutes before you read it.

Never dip above the line printed on the strip. Times vary slightly by brand, so check your insert.

STEP 5: READ THE RESULT

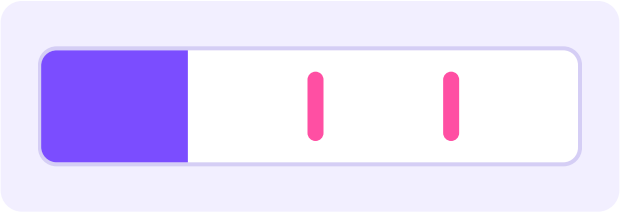
Read your result in bright light

An easy way to remember it: one line is positive, two lines is negative.



1 LINE = POSITIVE

Fentanyl was detected. Treat this drug as dangerous.



2 LINES = NEGATIVE

No fentanyl detected, even if the second line is faint. That does not mean the drug is safe.



NO LINE = INVALID

The test didn't work. Throw it away and test again with a new strip.

Hard to tell? Look again in bright light, or test again with a new strip.

IF IT'S POSITIVE

Fentanyl detected: what to do next

Best choice: don't use it

If the test is positive, the safest move is not to use that drug.

Keep naloxone within reach

Have it on you, and make sure anyone with you knows where it is.

Go slow, use less

If you do use, take a smaller amount first and wait. Avoid mixing with other drugs.

Don't use alone

Use with someone who can call 911 and give naloxone if needed.

Overdose? **Call 911** and give naloxone.

KNOW THE LIMITS

A negative result is not a green light

Not 100% accurate

Strips can miss fentanyl, so a negative never guarantees a drug is safe.

Can’t measure strength

A strip shows if fentanyl is there, not how much. A positive could mean a little or a lot.

The “chocolate chip” effect

Fentanyl can clump unevenly, so one part of a pill or bag may test negative while another doesn’t.

May miss some analogs

Some fentanyl relatives, like carfentanil, may not be detected.

Only tests for fentanyl

Strips don’t detect xylazine, nitazenes, or medetomidine.

Can be thrown off

Large amounts of drugs like meth or MDMA can make results less reliable.

Test strips lower your risk. They don’t remove it. Pair every test with naloxone and a plan.

KNOW YOUR PROTECTIONS

Massachusetts protects people who test

Chapter 285 of the Acts of 2024

Signed in December 2024, this law creates criminal and civil liability protections for people who, in good faith, provide or use fentanyl test strips or other drug testing equipment.

If you use strips

Using test strips in good faith is protected under the law.

If you provide strips

Giving out or providing test strips in good faith is protected too.

This is general information, not legal advice. If you have questions about a specific situation, a legal aid organization can help.

GET EQUIPPED

Where to get test strips and support



Life Force Harm Reduction

Free strips & training

Reach out to request free test strips and a hands-on walkthrough, or find us at pop-up sites and partner venues.



Harm reduction programs

Free · Ask for them

Many harm reduction organizations and syringe services programs hand out test strips. The National Harm Reduction Coalition can help you find one near you.



MA Substance Use Helpline

Free · Confidential · 24/7

Call or text “HOPE” to 800-327-5050 for resources, support, and next steps.

Test every time, and keep naloxone close.

SAVE THIS

Quick reference: testing for fentanyl

- **Crush and mix** a small sample, or collect residue
- **Add water** as directed and stir until fully dissolved
- **Dip** the strip to the line, about 15 seconds
- **Lay it flat** and wait about 3 minutes
- **Read in bright light:** 1 line = positive, 2 lines = negative, no line = retest
- **Positive?** Skip it, keep naloxone close, and don’t use alone

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Emergency: 911 | Mass Substance Use Helpline: 800-327-5050

Test every time.
Know what's in it.
Get home safe.

A negative result lowers your risk. It never erases it. Keep naloxone close, never use alone, and look out for each other.

Life Force Harm Reduction • Get Home Safe

Request free test strips, naloxone, or training: contact us to learn more.