



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Public Health Dept Warns Residents of Alarming Increase in Deaths from Fentanyl Overdose
*Synthetic opioid is 50 times more potent than heroin, often added to drugs without users' knowledge***

San Luis Obispo, CA—The Public Health Department has confirmed an alarming increase in deaths from fentanyl overdose in San Luis Obispo County. From May to October 2019, ten people have died in SLO County from toxic levels of fentanyl. This compares to two or fewer deaths per year since 2015.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 100 times more potent than morphine and 30-50 times more potent than heroin. It is used in the health care setting to provide pain relief for severely ill or injured patients, such as those with cancer or recovering from surgery. Fentanyl is also illegally manufactured and sold outside the health care setting. This illegal fentanyl is sold as a powder or in other forms, including pills that look like prescription opioids. It is sometimes mixed with other drugs—including heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine—with or without the user's knowledge. Because fentanyl is so strong, a tiny amount can cause a person to stop breathing.

Toxicology reports for the recent deaths in SLO County show that fentanyl has been mixed both with opioids and with stimulants such as methamphetamine. People who use stimulants may be less aware of the risks and signs of opioid overdose and less likely to have overdose reversal medicine available.

"Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones to overdose," said Dr. Penny Borenstein, Health Officer of the County of San Luis Obispo. "We want everyone to know: illicit fentanyl is here in San Luis Obispo County and it brings a high risk of overdose. Any drug you buy on the street may be contaminated with lethal levels of fentanyl."

The safest course of action is to not use illicit drugs. Though it is impossible to eliminate the risk of overdose if you use illicit drugs, you can take steps to lessen the risk:

- **Get naloxone.** If you or a loved one use illicit drugs—opioids or stimulants—get naloxone and learn how to use it. Naloxone (also known by its brand name Narcan) is a medicine that can reverse an opioid overdose. It is non-addictive, has virtually no side effects, and has no potential for abuse as it does not produce any high effect. It is not a controlled substance. It comes in the form of a nasal spray or an injection. Naloxone can save the life of a person experiencing a fentanyl overdose but because fentanyl is so strong, the person may require multiple doses; there is no guarantee the overdose will be reversed. See the attached list for details on where to get naloxone at low or no cost in SLO County.
- **Consider testing for fentanyl.** Fentanyl testing strips are being used to test the presence or absence of fentanyl and many fentanyl analogs (very closely related drugs) in the illicit drug supply. These strips are not completely accurate (in part because illegally-manufactured fentanyl varies in its chemical composition) but offer some information. In general, a negative result cannot rule out the possibility that fentanyl is present, but a positive result means that fentanyl is present. It is safest to assume that any illicit drug may contain traces of fentanyl. Test strips are

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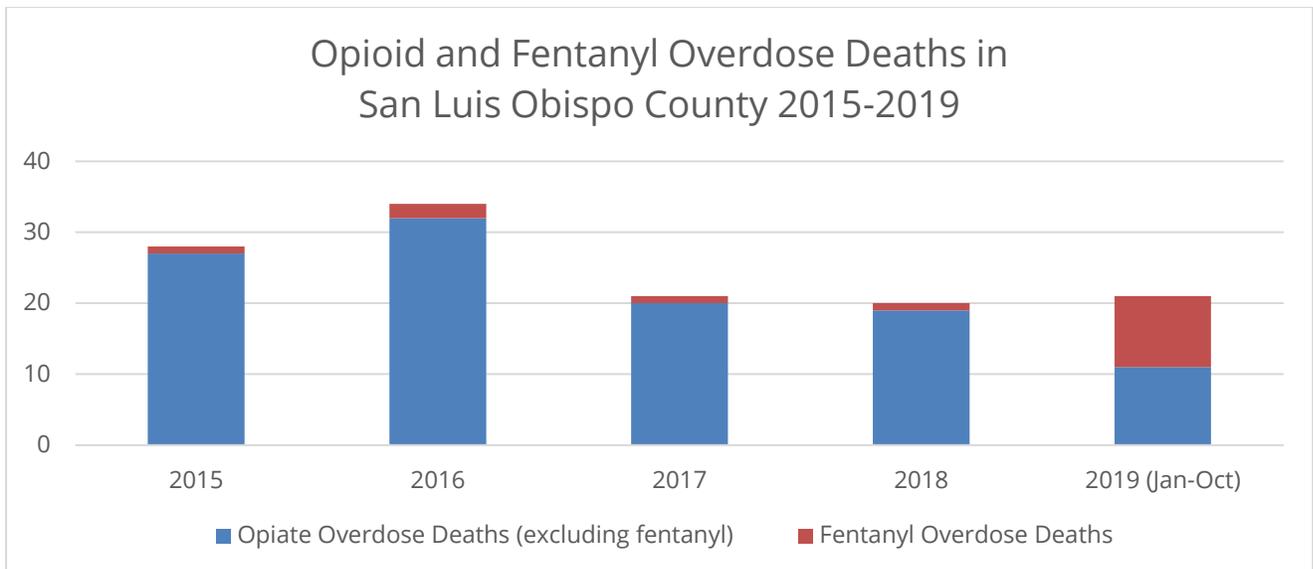
available for purchase commercially or provided through the [SLO Bangers](#) Syringe Exchange and Overdose Prevention Program.

- **Know the signs of overdose and be ready to call 911.** Signs of overdose include small, constricted “pinpoint” pupils; falling asleep or losing consciousness; slow, shallow breathing; choking or gurgling sounds; limp body; and pale, blue, or cold skin. If you aren’t sure, it is safest to treat the situation as a potential overdose. Call 911 and do not leave the person alone. California law ([AB 472](#), 2012) clarifies that it is not a crime to be under the influence if seeking medical assistance for an overdose victim.
- **Connect with treatment.** The County Drug & Alcohol Services team offers services to support recovery and can also help connect residents with other treatment programs. To learn more, visit [Drug & Alcohol Services](#) or call 800-838-1381.

If you’d like to get involved in addressing overdose and opioid misuse in SLO County, you’re invited to be part of the [SLO Opioid Safety Coalition](#). Since January 2016, this group has worked together on practical steps to address the opioid epidemic on the Central Coast. This group is driven by a diverse coalition of community members, including the County Behavioral Health and Public Health departments, law enforcement, physicians, pharmacists, treatment professionals, educators, community members, people in recovery and others.

For more information about fentanyl, visit www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/fentanyl.html.

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Where Can You Get Naloxone in SLO County?

Naloxone is available at no cost or low cost at locations countywide, including confidential or anonymous settings. It is fully covered (free) with Medi-Cal and is covered fully or in part by most insurance. It is available for people who use opioids for any reason and for those who know someone who does. Options include:

With Insurance

Certain pharmacy locations dispense naloxone from the pharmacist without a prescription. Please ask to speak to the pharmacist about acquiring the medication.

- Target Pharmacy (CVS within store)- San Luis Obispo, 11990 Los Osos Valley Rd, 805-858-9903
- Cayucos Pharmacy, 72 South Ocean Avenue, 805-995-3538
- CVS Pharmacy Paso Robles, 187 Niblick Road, 805-238-2947
- CVS Pharmacy Pismo Beach, 827 Oak Park Blvd., 805-473-0489
- CVS Pharmacy San Luis Obispo, 717 Marsh Street, 805-547-9986
- Cal Poly Health Services, 1 Grand Avenue, 805-756-1211
- Rite Aid Paso Robles- Williams Plaza, 1151 Creston Road, 805-239-3028
- Rite Aid Atascadero, 7025 El Camino Real, 805-466-8722
- Rite Aid Paso Robles-Spring Street, 2424 Spring Street, 805-239-1878
- Rite Aid Arroyo Grande, 1207 East Grand Ave., 805-489-1830
- Rite Aid SLO-Johnson Ave, 1251 Johnson Ave., 805-545-0655
- Rite Aid SLO-Foothill, 765 Foothill Blvd., 805-543-5697
- VONS Pharmacy-Grover Beach, 1758 Grand Ave., 805-481-2492
- VONS Pharmacy-Nipomo, 520 W. Tefft, 805-931-1860
- VONS Pharmacy-SLO, 3900 Broad St., 805-541-1132

Without Insurance & Confidential

The nonprofit [SLO Bangers](#) Syringe Exchange and Overdose Prevention Program provides both the nasal spray and injection forms of naloxone without a prescription, at no cost, and in a confidential setting. Call 805-458-0123 to learn more, or stop by Wednesdays from 5:30-8:30 p.m. at 2191 Johnson Ave, parking off of Bishop Street.