



# Distribution of Fentanyl Test Strips

**Center for Harm Reduction Services – Allison Thomson**

Standing Advisory Committee: December 6, 2019

# Background

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- 1,888 fentanyl-related deaths occurred in Maryland in 2018.<sup>1</sup>
- 455% increase since 2015 (340 deaths).<sup>1</sup>
- Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Anne Arundel County with the highest number of fentanyl-related deaths.<sup>1</sup>
- Fentanyl Test Strips (FTS)
  - Tool for people who use drugs to screen for the presence of fentanyl
  - Provide knowledge to individual who may decide to change behavior to reduce overdose risk
  - BTNX strips are cost effective and can detect small amounts of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs

# Developing Evidence Base

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- Study focused on young adults (18-24) in Rhode Island found that a positive FTS led to self-reported behavior change<sup>2</sup>
- Study in Greensboro, NC found that FTS was associated with changes in drug use behavior and increased perceived overdose safety<sup>3</sup>
  - Those with a positive FTS has 5x the odds of reporting changes in drug use behavior<sup>3</sup>
- FORECAST Study: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
  - Found that 84% of participants were concerned about fentanyl, and drug checking would help them protect themselves from overdose<sup>4</sup>
  - Baltimore City results showed that 70% did NOT prefer drugs containing fentanyl<sup>4</sup>

2. Goldman et al. Perspectives on rapid fentanyl test strips as a harm reduction practice among young adults who use drugs: a qualitative study. *Harm Reduction Journal*. 2019; 16:3.

3. Peiper et al. Fentanyl test strips as an opioid overdose prevention strategy: Findings from a syringe services program in the Southeastern United States. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 2019; 63: 122-128.

4. Sherman, S.G., Park, J.N., Glick, J., McKenzie, M., Morales, K., Christensen, T., Green, T.C. (2018) FORECAST Study Summary Report. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

# Distribution to ORPs

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- The Center for Harm Reduction Services (CHRS) distributed FTS to authorized Overdose Response Programs (ORPs)
  - ORPs required to submit applications to CHRS
  - Each ORP was required to send representative to attend “training of trainers” program provided by CHRS and Maryland’s Harm Reduction Training Institute
  - Intent to utilize existing naloxone distribution networks: there are >125 ORPs
- CHRS requiring all ORPs receiving test strips to collect evaluation survey responses from at least 20 individuals
- 3 part survey
  - 1st section: demographic questions
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> section: for participants who intend to test their own drugs
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> section: for participants who have previously used FTS

# Community Distribution

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- **Current reported number of FTS distributed: 6,668 (10.4%)**
- **Current number of FTS recipients: 2,382**
- Common methods of community distribution
  - Syringe Service Programs (SSPs)
  - Peer Outreach
  - Street Outreach/Backpack model
  - Community Outreach Events
  - Mobile Units
  - Treatment Facilities
  - Leave Behind Programs
  - Recovery Centers
  - Detention Centers

# Barriers/Challenges

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- Lack of staff for outreach
- Individuals unwilling to discuss fentanyl
- Stigma with requesting FTS
- Lack of trust with staff
- Belief that drug supply will be wasted
- Belief that fentanyl is in everything
- Agency and community buy-in

# *Analysis of Evaluation Surveys*

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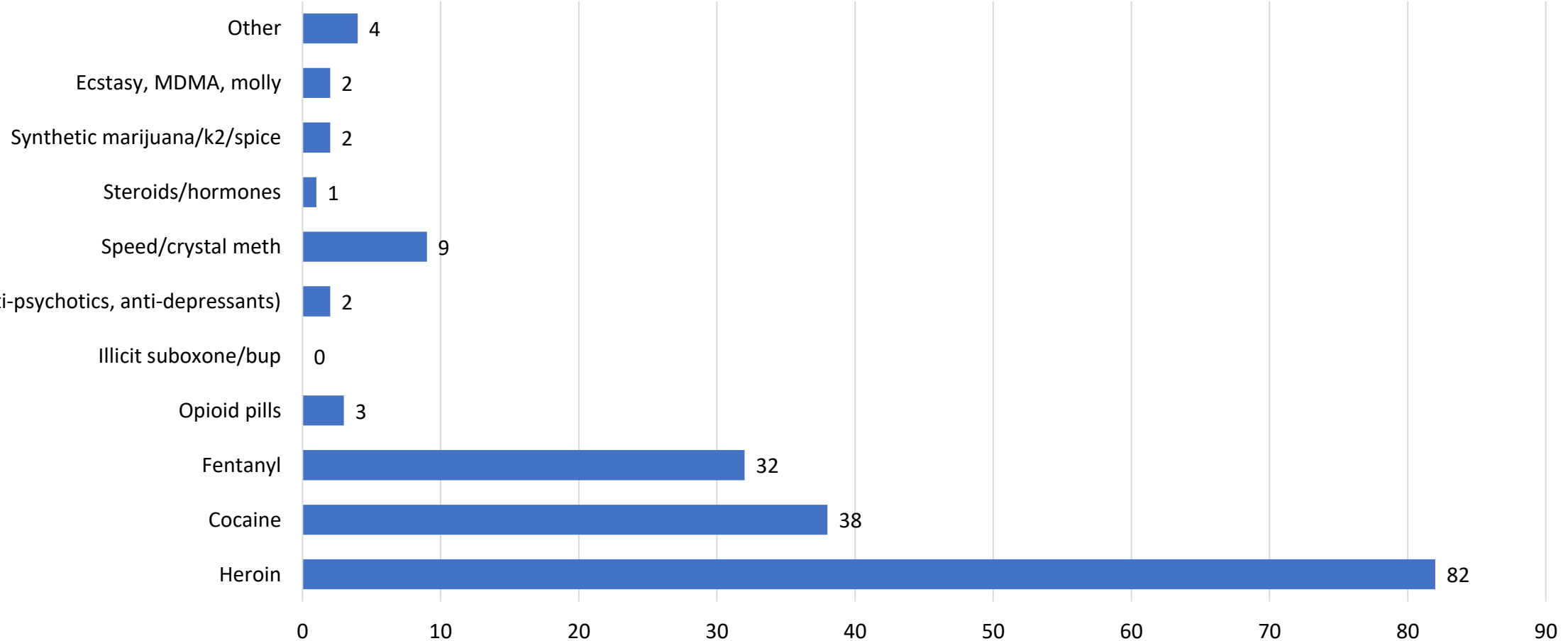
# Demographics of Survey Participants

Age	Total (%)
<18	3 (1.7)
18-24	29 (16.4)
25-34	53 (29.9)
35-44	25 (14.1)
45-54	29 (16.4)
55-64	33 (18.6)
>65	5 (2.8)

- 53.7% Female, 45.8% Male, 0.6% Transgender
- 61.6% White, 33.3% Black, African American, 1.7% Hispanic/Latino, 3.4% Other
- 26% reported currently experiencing homelessness or couch-surfing
- 67.8% reported illicit drug use in the past 3 months



# Drugs Recipients Planned on Testing Using FTS



# Preference for Fentanyl

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- FORECAST study found that 27% preferred fentanyl<sup>4</sup>
- Those who indicated a preference for fentanyl were more likely to be younger, white, and daily users

Preference to use fentanyl	Total (%)
Yes	32 (26.4)
No	89 (73.6)

- *“Only thing that keeps me well”*
- *“I’m addicted to fentanyl”*
- *“Once I started using it nothing else works”*
- *“It’s what my body is accustomed to”*

# Fentanyl Test Strip Use

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- 54 participants had previously used FTS
- **89% of participants who used FTS previously reported a positive result**
- 83.3% were not surprised by FTS results

# 91.1% of participants whose drugs tested positive for fentanyl reported making a behavior change



- 25% threw drugs out
- 25% used less drugs
- 22.9% did a test shot
- 20.8% used drugs more slowly
- 16.7% used drugs with other people rather than alone
- 1.1% gave them away/sold to someone else
- 4.2% snorted instead of injected
- 8.3% sought out naloxone/Narcan
- 16.7% kept more than one dose of naloxone on hand
- 4.2% sought drug treatment, counseling, or a support group
- 12.5% educated others about fentanyl and overdose
- 14.6% let seller know test results

# Conclusion

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- MDH's roll out of fentanyl test strips to Overdose Response Programs could be strengthened with continued follow up and technical assistance, but there remains ORP demand for FTS
  - Over 90% of ORPs hope to continue distribution of FTS
- Most – 90% of Marylanders who encountered a positive FTS result changed their behavior to implement an overdose risk reduction strategy
- This preliminary work encourages the Center for Harm Reduction Services to find support to continue FTS distribution as part of its overdose prevention portfolio