



False reports of fentanyl in cannabis.

There continue to be FALSE reports of cannabis containing fentanyl. These reports:

- Have not been based on complete scientific evidence
- Are often made before any laboratory analysis
- Leave out contextual details
- Likely have alternate explanations

Important: There have been NO laboratory confirmed cases of fentanyl in cannabis in Canada.

What does lab-based analysis tell us?

In Canada, there have been no documented lab-based analysis of cannabis testing positive for fentanyl. The Drug Analysis Service (DAS) at Health Canada, which tests samples submitted by police, has never found a cannabis sample test positive for fentanyl. (*DAS communication May 14, 2019*)

In Ontario, a May 2019 alert: *Substance That Resembles Cannabis Found To Contain Carfentanil*, left out some important details. The alert included an out-of-focus picture of a green coloured clump, but the actual substance had no resemblance to cannabis in texture, smell or weight. As well, it was not being marketed or sold as cannabis.

In Calgary, a February 2019 alert: *New Fentanyl Product*, was circulated by 'Imperial Kearn' (an oil company), stating a sample 'that clearly looks like cannabis' was 'tested and found to contain no cannabis, but did contain fentanyl.' OHRN contacted DAS, responsible for testing the sample, and DAS replied:

To clarify, the sample was NOT plant material. The sample in question was analysed at the Health Canada Drug Analysis Services Lab in Burnaby, and we have been dealing with this particular sample for quite a while. It was submitted as suspected cannabis, most likely because it was a green clump, but when viewed under the microscope it looked like a crystalline type material, that was not plant material. It was a strange matrix, clumpy and squishy in a way, and hard to crush. When we analysed it there was no THC or any other cannabinoid in the material, it contained only Fentanyl and Etizolam.

As well, the police force that confiscated and submitted the sample, is reported to have written:

While it looks like cannabis in a photograph or from a distance, it had NO RESEMBLANCE to cannabis in weight, scent, or texture. There is NO INDICATION the substance was being presented/marketed as cannabis. Any link between this substance and cannabis is unfounded. Reporting of seizure: newsroom.calgary.ca/man-charged-with-trafficking-fentanyl/



What about reports that people, who only smoke cannabis, test positive for fentanyl?

- Fentanyl-positive urine screens have been documented in people who self-report ‘only using cannabis’, but this is not direct evidence of drug adulteration.
- People who report only using cannabis may have reasons or incentives to be not entirely forthcoming about their use of other drugs. They may be comfortable disclosing cannabis use, but hesitant to disclose the use of opioids or other drugs, because there is less stigma and judgment associated with cannabis. For example:
 - A person enrolled in a drug treatment program (such as a methadone treatment) that requires abstinence from opioids but not other drugs, would be reluctant to admit to using opioids, so they say, “I just smoked cannabis; it must have been laced.”
 - A teenager might overdose but when revived say, “I was only using cannabis”, because they are afraid of the consequences of admitting they are experimenting with opioids.

Other considerations

- It makes no sense financially for dealers and suppliers to ‘lace/cut/spike’ low-profit margin cannabis with high-profit-margin fentanyl.
- Some people have suggested dealers are ‘lacing’ cannabis with fentanyl in order to create a ‘physical dependency’ in people purchasing cannabis. It would be almost impossible to add fentanyl in amounts needed to develop a physical dependency, but not cause an overdose.

Important messaging

- ‘**Cross contamination**’ of fentanyl powder to cannabis (as opposed to deliberate adulteration) is a possibility. For example, residue from a re-used baggie, or from a surface when preparing a cannabis joint.
- Dealers and suppliers of drugs have a role to play in ensuring drugs they are selling are not cross-contaminated. The **Toronto Overdose Prevention Society** (@TorontoOPS) has developed a tip sheet.