Top 10 List of Safety Tips for Fentanyl Patches

[Extra care is needed because fentanyl is a high-alert medicine.]

High-alert medicines have been proven to be safe and effective. But these medicines can cause serious injury if a mistake happens while taking them. This means that it is very important for you to know about this medicine and take it exactly as directed.

Before you use the patches

1. Use for chronic pain only. Fentanyl patches should ONLY be used to treat long-term pain by people who have previously taken high doses of prescription pain medicine (opioids) for 7 or more days without relief. Otherwise, the medicine can cause serious breathing problems.

2. Use intact patches. Never cut the patches or use damaged patches (could result in an overdose).

3. Avoid broken skin. Apply patches only on unshaved skin without cuts or sores.

When picking up the prescription

4. Talk to your pharmacist. Tell your pharmacist the type of pain you are experiencing and any other pain medicines you have been taking and for how long.

While wearing a fentanyl patch

5. Follow directions. Use the patches exactly as directed to prevent serious side effects. Don’t use more patches than prescribed. Take off the old patch before applying a new patch.

6. Don’t warm your patches. While wearing a fentanyl patch, don’t expose the site to heat sources such as a heating pad, electric blanket, sauna, hot tub, heated waterbed, excessive sun exposure, or hot climate. Also, avoid tight coverings over the patch and strenuous exercise, which can heat the body. The body absorbs too much medicine with excessive heat.

7. Take care around children. Don’t let children see you apply a patch. Don’t apply the patch where children can see it or on areas with frequent movement. Used patches still contain medicine, so check often that the patch has not fallen off, especially after exercising, bathing, and sleeping. Consider taping the patch to your skin so it doesn’t come off your body. Children have found patches that have fallen off or removed patches on sleeping adults and put them in their mouths or on their bodies with deadly results. If a patch is chewed, sucked on, or ingested, seek immediate medical attention.

8. Report signs of an overdose. Signs of an overdose include: trouble breathing, shallow or very slow breathing; extreme sleepiness; inability to think, talk, or walk normally; and feeling faint, dizzy, or confused.

Storing and discarding the patches

9. Store patches safely. Keep new patches far away from the reach or discovery of children. Don’t let children see you apply patches or call them stickers, tattoos, or bandages. This could attract children and encourage them to mimic your actions.

10. Dispose of patches safely. Safely discard used or unneeded patches by folding the sticky sides together and flushing them down the toilet. Some of the medicine remains in the patch after use, which could harm others who come into contact with it. The US Food and Drug Administration recommends flushing patches to quickly and effectively make sure a child or pet can’t get to them and be harmed by the leftover medicine.

Don’t use fentanyl patches to treat short-term pain after surgery!

Fentanyl patches should ONLY be used by people with long-term chronic pain who have been taking high doses of prescription pain medicine (opioids) for 7 or more days without relief. Otherwise, the medicine can cause you to breathe too slowly or stop breathing.

For more information to help keep you safe, visit: www.consumermedsafety.org.
Off with the old, on with the new

Used fentanyl patches still contain some medicine after you take them off. This is why it is important to always take off the old patch before placing a new one on your skin. If you don’t, you could receive an overdose of the medicine.

Both new and used patches can also be dangerous to children or pets. In a tragic accident, a 4-year-old child died after placing a fentanyl patch on his body. His mother had been using fentanyl patches to treat pain from Crohn’s disease, a digestive tract disorder. After she found her son dead, she also found a torn fentanyl patch wrapper in an overturned trashcan in her bedroom. A 2-year-old child and a 15-month-old baby died recently after they found used fentanyl patches, put them in their mouths, and swallowed them.

Children have also been exposed to medicine patches that have fallen off a family member. One child sat on a fallen patch and it stuck to her thigh. Another child removed a patch while his grandmother was sleeping and put it on himself. In these cases, the patches were noticed quickly and the children weren’t injured.

See safety tips #7, #9, and #10 (other side) for ways to keep children safe.