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## Take-home drug test strips another tool to prevent fentanyl overdoses

People in the Interior Health (IH) region have another tool to make safer choices about drug use. For some, the stigma or shame associated with seeking out substance use services can be a barrier to accessing the health system. Now, new take-home drug testing strips are available and offer an alternative to clients who previously had to come into supervised consumption sites or community health centres to check their drugs.

“Because of the stigma that still surrounds addiction, many people die from overdose alone and at home,” said Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “Giving people a simple, convenient way to check if their drugs contain fentanyl may help them avoid an overdose, and reduce the number of lives lost to the unpredictable and toxic drug supply.”

The fentanyl test strips are available for take-home at community-based agencies in Vernon, Kelowna, Penticton, Kamloops, Merritt, Cranbrook and Nelson. More information on agency locations and hours can be found on IH’s website: [www.drugchecking.ca](http://www.drugchecking.ca).

“For many people, there’s a certain amount of shame associated with their addiction, which makes it challenging for them to access drug-checking services at health care facilities,” said Roger Parsonage, Interior Health Executive Director, Clinical Operations, with responsibility for Mental Health and Substance Use Network. “With these take-home drug checking strips, they can now make informed, safer choices – this service has the potential to save lives.”

A study completed by IH, Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) concluded that take-home drug checking indicated a positive result for fentanyl in opioid samples at a similar rate as on-site testing at community-based agencies.

The research study was conducted from April to July of 2019 and provided participants with free take-home drug checking kits, each containing five fentanyl test strips, instructions, and a survey. Results from 994 take-home fentanyl test strips used on opioid samples were compared to checks on opioids conducted at health care and community sites during the same time period.

- Take-home drug checking found 89.95 per cent of opioid samples contained fentanyl, while on-site drug checking found 89.14 per cent of samples contained fentanyl.
- 27 per cent of clients using the take-home kit made a safer choice if their substance tested positive for fentanyl. (A safer choice refers to using with a friend, using less of a substance or using more slowly, or taking their substance to an overdose or supervised consumption site for use.)
- 96 per cent of clients said they would use the take-home checking kit again.

“Take-home test strips are something clients have been asking for, and now we have some promising evidence for their use. This is one more tool among other strategies we have implemented to address the ongoing opioid overdose crisis,” says Jessica Bridgeman, IH Harm Reduction Coordinator. “Take-home drug checking can be particularly helpful to those in rural and remote communities who may not have access to other overdose prevention services.”

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Originally intended for urine drug tests, the use of fentanyl testing strips to check the drugs themselves for fentanyl was pioneered by VCH in 2016. A small amount of a drug is mixed with a few drops of water, the test strip is inserted into the solution, and a positive or negative for fentanyl is revealed within seconds.

*Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 750,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca), follow us on Twitter [@Interior\\_Health](https://twitter.com/Interior_Health), follow us on Instagram [@weareIH](https://www.instagram.com/weareIH), or like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth](https://www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth).*

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**Media, for information:**

[Media@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:Media@interiorhealth.ca)

**1-844-469-7077**