

Our ref H20/62539

Dear Doctor

WARNING – MISUSE OF FENTANYL PATCHES

Key messages

- Fentanyl is a highly potent synthetic opioid
- One fentanyl 100mcg / hour patch applied every 3 days is the equivalent of 300mg of morphine orally daily
- Fentanyl can be extracted from patches and misused
- The risk of drug dependence on fentanyl patches is high
- Fentanyl misuse is an emerging problem
- Prescribers should carefully establish genuine need before prescribing

Use of fentanyl patches carries a number of risks of overdose, with a small margin between an appropriate therapeutic dose and a toxic dose. Use of fentanyl patches requires care when commencing treatment and is only appropriate in patients in whom opioid analgesic treatment is well established. Use in opioid naïve patients is rarely if ever/never justified. It is recommended that a patient's drug and alcohol history is assessed before any opioid is prescribed.

Misuse of fentanyl patches

A number of deaths have been associated with the misuse of fentanyl patches, including multiple patches applied for an intoxicating effect and the injection of fentanyl extracted from fentanyl patches.

Fentanyl patches have a high illicit value and are subject to trafficking. In Australia the main source of fentanyl patches used illicitly is from those obtained on prescription.

Know the rules

In NSW, if the patient is considered to be drug dependent, even if a legitimate pain condition exists, it is necessary to apply for an authority prior to prescribing for an individual patient under the requirements of the *Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act*. Application forms are available at:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pharmaceutical/Documents/S8pain-appln.pdf>

NSW Health Contact Details:

More information is available on the NSW Ministry of Health Pharmaceutical Services website:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pharmaceutical/Pages/fentanylmisuse.aspx>

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