

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: February 18, 2022

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Director Department of Health and Human Services

Subject: An informational report from the Director, Department of Health and Human Services, on the status of the distribution of fentanyl test strips

File Type: Informational Report

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**REQUEST**

The Milwaukee County Board requested an informational report on the acquisition and disbursal of fentanyl test strips by DHHS Behavioral Health Services (BHS).

**POLICY**

Senate Bill 600

**BACKGROUND**

The State Legislature passed Senate Bill 600 and now awaits the Governor's signature. The bill decriminalizes the use of fentanyl testing strips. Previously under State law, fentanyl test strips were considered drug paraphernalia making it a felony to use or possess them. The legislation, led by Sup. Sylvia Ortiz-Velez was critical due to the following devastating realities:

- Fentanyl is present in the vast majority of deaths from drug overdose. In 2020, 400 of the 544 overdose deaths in Milwaukee County involved fentanyl. In 2021, the number is expected to be three times the homicide rate (toxicology reports still pending).
- Fentanyl is 50-100 times more powerful than morphine. A prescription opioid, it is often mixed into street drugs including cocaine, methamphetamine, MDMA or formed into pills to resemble oxycodone.
- Given its potency as a synthetic opioid, between 2015 and 2020, the number of overdose deaths involving fentanyl in Milwaukee County rose rapidly from 8% to 73%.
- The only way to know if fentanyl is present is to use a testing strip, which provides 100% accuracy for approx. \$1 per strip. However, use of these strips is a felony. Individuals with substance abuse disorders should be able to test for fentanyl to avoid exposure.
- First responders including EMTs, and law enforcement professionals would be better equipped to manage overdose crisis situations as well as better protect themselves from exposure if

- able to utilize testing strips.

Behavioral Health Services, in collaboration with the Milwaukee Health Department, have an immediate supply of fentanyl testing strips to be distributed as soon as the Governor signs the bill into law. The State Department of Health Services has a plan to ensure a sustainable supply of test strips to Milwaukee County, and BHS will distribute these to Access Points and other logical community-based partners. A press release (attached) has been prepared to make the public aware of this important step forward in reducing overdose deaths in the Milwaukee community.

Related File No's:	N/A
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	N/A
Previous Action Date(s):	N/A

**ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

This program aligns with the county’s strategic plan under 2A - Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity, 2C - Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions and 3B - Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability. With opioid deaths rising within our community and the Black community, in particular, DHHS is working to apply every possible resource to reverse this trend.

**FISCAL EFFECT**

None.

**TERMS**

Not applicable.

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Shakita LaGrant McClain  
Michael Lappen

**PREPARED BY:**

Michael Lappen, MS, LPC, Behavioral Health Services Administrator

**APPROVED BY:**

*Shakita LaGrant-McClain*

Shakita LaGrant McClain, Director DHHS

**ATTACHMENT:**

Press Release – Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Services to Distribute 1,600 Fentanyl Testing Strips to Help Prevent Opioid-Related Deaths

cc: County Executive David Crowley  
Sup. Felesia Martin, Chair, Health Equity, Human Needs & Strategic Planning Committee  
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office  
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Steve Cady, Research and Policy Director – Comptroller's Office  
Allyson Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk  
Pam Matthews, Budget Analyst – DAS  
Lottie Maxwell-Mitchell, Research & Policy Analyst, Comptroller's Office