

Fentanyl patch for pain relief

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is an opioid (strong) painkiller.

Why is my child being prescribed a fentanyl patch?

A fentanyl patch is prescribed when a child or young person needs regular, strong pain relief medicine to keep their pain under control. The patch aims to continuously release fentanyl to give a constant supply of background pain relief medicine. Fentanyl patches work alongside the immediate release (quick acting) pain relief medicines (for example, morphine or oxycodone tablets or liquids) which should be given when their pain breaks through.

Topical fentanyl patch



A fentanyl patch will be prescribed for pain management when:

- Your child's pain is under control and opioid painkillers are being taken
- Your child is struggling to take oral medication and needs an opioid to control their pain.

How does a fentanyl patch work?

Fentanyl works by blocking the pain signals between the site of your child's pain and their brain. The patch slowly releases fentanyl through the skin and into the bloodstream so that there is a continuous release of painkiller giving your child constant background pain relief.

How is a fentanyl patch used?

- The fentanyl patch is a small, thin, clear patch that is applied with the adhesive side stuck onto a flat, hairless part of your child's skin. This is usually on the top of their arm, back of their shoulder, upper legs or chest



- The patch is usually changed at a similar time every three days (72 hours).
- There are a range of fentanyl patches of varying strengths which will be prescribed depending on your child's pain experience. The symptom care team will advise you.
- Occasionally you may be advised by a specialist nurse or doctor to cut a fentanyl patch so that the appropriate dose can be given to your child for their pain. This is because the strength of a whole patch may cause unwanted side effects.

A patient safety alert was issued in October 2018 by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to advise health care professionals to no longer cut fentanyl patches. However, your child may require a smaller dose than can be delivered by a whole patch. We are able to advise cutting the patch under the guidance of our paediatric pharmacist and paediatric palliative care consultant. It is imperative that any used or unused patches are disposed of.

Safe disposal of a fentanyl patch

After use or cutting, patches should be folded so that the adhesive (sticky) side of the unused patch adheres to itself and then is placed back into the original sachet or wrapped in tissue if not available. This must then be immediately disposed of; ideally in a sharps bin. This is to ensure that accidental swallowing of an unused patch cannot occur.

- Ensure that the old fentanyl patch is removed before a new fentanyl patch is applied
- Check the fentanyl patch is stuck to the skin to ensure the patch has not accidentally been transferred to another person through skin to skin contact – this should be done each day
- Wash your hands after handling.

(Please read the instruction leaflet that accompanies the patches for further information on how to apply correctly).

What special precautions should I follow?

- **The first time** you apply the patch, it can take up to 12 hours for the fentanyl to take full effect. Please make sure that your child continues to take their immediate release morphine or oxycodone medicine as needed during this time.
- After the first fentanyl patch change, the levels of medication in the blood will remain at a steady level. Any change of dose will take 12 hours to take effect.
- If your child has an increased temperature (fever) their body may use more fentanyl and the patch may need to be changed more often. This must be discussed with a healthcare professional. If your child is sweaty, you may need to apply an additional clear dressing over the patch to keep it in place.
- Take care not to expose the patch to direct heat, such as radiators, hair dryers, hot water bottles and hot baths, as this can cause a rapid amount of fentanyl to be released into your child's bloodstream.



- Please ensure you change the site that you stick the patch to each time the patch is changed, for example, a different part of their arm.
- Do not apply the patch on fragile skin and make sure to remove it gently
- If your child has any difficulties in having the patch changed, please speak to your healthcare team for further advice.

What side effects might my child experience when using a fentanyl patch?

Fentanyl is a morphine-like medicine and the side effects are similar to morphine side effects.

- Drowsiness or sleepiness (especially for the first 24 hours after starting or increasing the dose)
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Difficulty in passing urine
- Hallucinations
- Sweating
- Constipation
- Headache
- Skin rash (localised)
- Itching.

If you notice that your child is experiencing an **unusual** level of drowsiness and/or is breathing more slowly or weakly than normal, and you feel is not related to their illness, remove the patch And contact The Royal Marsden paediatric 24 hour advice line OR the symptom care team (CYPOONS) **urgently** for further advice.

Contact details

If you have any questions about this information, please contact:

The Royal Marsden Paediatric 24 hour advice line: 020 8915 6248

OR

The Children and Young Person's Oncology Outreach and Symptom Care Nurse Specialists (CYPOONS) Team, Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm: 020 8661 3625

