

Opioid/Unknown Substance PPE Recommendation

In the past months, the national opioid response has become more complex due to the increasing presence of novel opioids contaminating what is being sold as “heroin”. These contaminants include fentanyl, as well as fentanyl analogues, such as carfentanyl, acetyl fentanyl, and furanyl fentanyl. Additionally, alternate classes of drugs, including methamphetamine, are being mixed with heroin. This guidance document is appropriate for any unknown substance, including cocaine and methamphetamine. The purpose of this memo is to offer recommendations surrounding healthcare provider safety when caring for these patients.

 Assess the situation for provider safety

 Maintain caution while initiating patient assessment. Use standard precautions appropriate for the circumstances initially encountered.

 If you encounter an unknown substance, consider additional PPE. See below for guidance.



1. Stay Safe

Perform a risk assessment. Look for uncontained substances, vials, or exposed needles.



2. Protect Yourself

Throughout the care of the patient, remain observant for unknown substances. Maintain standard universal precautions or the level of PPE dictated by the patient circumstances.



3. Don't Touch

Never touch substances or items that look suspicious such as vials, exposed needles, or powders. Treat unknown substances as you would blood or body fluids. ***It is the powder not the patient***, that is potentially dangerous to healthcare providers.



4. Wear the Proper PPE

If you encounter an unknown substance, take appropriate precautions. This includes gloves, appropriate eye protection and coverage of exposed skin. If you encounter an aerosolized powder, an N95 mask may also be used. If large quantities of unknown substances are encountered, higher levels of PPE and further resources are required. Contact HazMat personnel as deemed appropriate. Should clothing or skin come into contact with dust or particles of the unknown substance communicate this exposure with other on-scene personnel and wash clothing and/or skin as soon as possible.

