



# Ensuring the Safety of Children Services Staff in the Era of Opioids

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Since the opioid crisis began in Ohio, the safety of caseworkers and those they come in contact with has been threatened in new ways. PCSAs must consider and adjust to the safety challenges posed by the crisis. Among the dangers is the threat of overdose, and the threat of accidental exposure to highly dangerous synthetic opioids. Various considerations can be made to account for these dangers.

The purpose of this guide is to offer PCSAs a list of considerations and resources should they choose to develop safety policies. The list is not exhaustive, nor should this be considered legal advice. This document was developed with input from PCSA directors, human resources staff and others.

Some agencies have elected not to develop any new policies, relying on existing policies, or they have been advised by legal counsel not to develop any policies that may increase the agency's liability. This guide is not intended to encourage such policy development, only to offer questions for consideration and links to existing policies. While CORSA does not cover every PCSA, it has developed one opioid-related policy, but for law enforcement, not children services. Direct link:

- [Law Enforcement](#) (drafted by CORSA)

Questions should always be directed to your agency or county human resources department or to agency counsel.

## Developing a Narcan Policy

One way to hedge against the threat of overdose, whether from accidental contact or intentional use, is to make naloxone (Narcan) available in various settings. Several PCSAs in Ohio have created policies on Narcan and its use. The following questions are important points to consider including in a policy of your own:

### Questions to consider:

- **Where will Narcan be carried/made available?**
  - In the agency? In the lobby only? In the field?
- **Who will be equipped to carry Narcan?**
  - What positions/individuals will carry Narcan?
  - How will they be selected?
- **How will those expected to carry Narcan be trained?**
  - Who will administer the training?
  - Where/when will it be held?
  - What about staff who voluntarily take training and carry Narcan without the authority of the PCSA?

- On whom will Narcan be permitted to be administered?
  - PCSA personnel only?
  - Clients and others?
  - Children?
- How will Narcan be procured?
  - Budget for purchase
  - Health offices
  - Project DAWN
    - See the [Project DAWN website](#) for more information, including a list of [Project DAWN sites](#).
- What is the procedure if someone overdoses?
  - Does procedure vary for adults and children?
- How will Narcan be safely stored?
  - Expiration and replacement

Several county PCSA Narcan policy documents are uploaded to [pcsao.org](http://pcsao.org), under the tab “Publications and Resources” > “Caseworker Safety.” Direct links:

- [Trumbull County Children Services](#)
- [Tuscarawas County Job and Family Services](#)
- Licking County Job and Family Services: [Policy](#) and [Naloxone Acknowledgment Form](#)

A sample policy from a school district relating to the procurement and administration of Narcan may be useful. Direct link:

- School District: [Procurement](#) and [Administration](#)

## Developing a Policy on Personnel Contact with Drugs

The opioid crisis has given way to highly dangerous derivatives such as fentanyl and carfentanil. These and other drugs can lead to overdose with minimal contact and may pose a risk to any PCSA personnel who come in contact with them.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) have published safety guidelines for people who may come in contact with fentanyl or similarly dangerous derivatives. *The full text of their reports can be found at [pcsao.org](http://pcsao.org), under the tab “Publications and Resources” > “Caseworker Safety.”* Direct links:

- [Drug Enforcement Administration](#)
- [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health](#)

Recommendations include:

- If possible, avoid handling the substance;
- Avoid actions that could aerosolize the substance;
  - A substance is aerosolized when it is put into the air and can be inhaled
- Thoroughly wash hands or other contaminated areas with soap and water after leaving an area where fentanyl is suspected to be present;
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when in an area where fentanyl is present; and
- Properly train personnel who may come in contact with fentanyl.

### *Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)*

When PCSA personnel must enter an area or situation where fentanyl or other dangerous substances are or may be present, wearing PPE could lower the associated risk. A PCSA may consider policies related to staff in the field that relate to attire or special equipment. First, PCSAs may want to review existing policies relating to dress code for staff who work in the field. Caseworkers who wear open-toed shoes, for example, may be directly exposed to drugs or drug residue on the floor of a client's home.

Some agencies have purchased safety kits for caseworkers to keep in their cars.

- For situations in which fentanyl may be present but no fentanyl is visible, NIOSH suggests that nitrile gloves be on hand.
  - Industrial nitrile gloves average \$0.20 per glove. See [here](#) to browse various brands.
- In a situation where small amounts of fentanyl are visible, NIOSH suggests disposable respiratory protection, eye protection, and wrist/arm protection as well as nitrile gloves.
  - Disposable respirators cost less than \$10 on average. See [here](#).
  - Protective glasses cost less than \$10 on average. See [here](#).
  - A long-sleeved shirt can serve as arm protection. Disposable arm sleeves cost under \$10 a pack. See [here](#).

*Refer to the [NIOSH report](#) for specifications for eye, hand, arm and respiratory protection. We recommend that you investigate the qualities of the various products on the market and compare them to the standards set out in the NIOSH report. These links are intended to give you a general price expectation, not endorse specific products. Agencies may consider creating a procedure for ascertaining when PPE is or may be necessary, and providing means to properly have and deploy PPE in those cases.*

## Training

PCSAOs may consider policies relating to the training of staff who may reasonably come into contact with fentanyl or other dangerous substances to ensure safety. NIOSH suggests training that ensures:

- Ability to recognize fentanyl and other dangerous substances;
- Knowledge of how and when to use PPE, including how to put it on and take it off safely before and after contact with the substance;
- Ability to recognize signs of opioid exposure; and
- Knowledge of fentanyl's routes of exposure (what sorts of contact are dangerous).

Training will help caseworkers and staff know how to safely navigate dangerous situations involving opioids.

*For more specific information regarding PPE guidelines at various risk levels and training guidelines, consult the DEA and NIOSH reports found at [pcsao.org](http://pcsao.org), under the tab "Publications and Resources" > "Caseworker Safety." (See links above.)*

## Developing a Policy on Found Drugs

Agencies may consider what procedures should be in place to protect personnel, children and families when they encounter unidentified substances. This could be relevant in many settings as caseworkers and other personnel conduct their daily business inside and outside agency offices. For example, a client may surreptitiously bring drugs into the agency and leave drugs and drug paraphernalia in the lobby restroom. The following questions may help you begin to consider relevant aspects of this issue.

### Questions to consider:

- How can found drugs be identified safely?
- How and when should found drugs be handled by agency personnel?
- Who should be contacted if it is thought a found drug is dangerous to handle?
- How should the safety of other people who are present be ensured?
- How should an area that has come into contact with fentanyl be cleaned?
  - See an [Ohio Attorney General BCI report](#) on OxiClean as an effective cleaning agent

*For a sample found drugs policy, see the Columbus Library's Found drugs policy posted on pcsao.org, under the tab "Publications and Resources" > "Caseworker Safety." Direct link:*

- [Library](#) (disposal of found drugs)

## **Committee**

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