

# Nevada Is About to Learn that Fentanyl Is an Effective Way to Kill People



By Alex Berezow — August 31, 2017



Credit: Public Domain/Wikipedia [1]

The death penalty has become a controversial topic in the United States\*. A large number of U.S. and European companies do not want their products used in lethal injections, which has sent state governments scrambling for alternatives. [Oklahoma](#) [2] has recently administered pentobarbital, a drug normally used to euthanize animals, in its lethal cocktails.

An upcoming execution in the State of Nevada will pioneer yet another chemical: Fentanyl.

Fentanyl is a synthetic drug that has played a [substantial role in the surge of opioid overdose deaths](#) [3] in the country. Just a few milligrams of the substance can be lethal, an amount equivalent to several grains of salt. Given that the drug has likely killed thousands of Americans already, its efficacy as a method of execution isn't really in doubt.

Yet, people who are opposed to the death penalty are claiming just that. In an [article](#) [4] for Vice, the ACLU claimed, "Use of these drugs could result in a botched execution, leading to torture or a lingering death."

That's nonsense. Opposition to the death penalty, [a position the ACLU holds](#) [5], is perfectly respectable; distorting biomedical science to advance that political goal, however, is not.

## **Fentanyl: Not a Bad Way to Die**

What happens to somebody when he overdoses on opioids? A different [article](#) [6] in Vice explains. In a nutshell, opioids make a person euphoric and then sleepy. Then, the drug causes breathing to slow and eventually stop, and the person can go into cardiac arrest (i.e., his heart stops beating). The only truly unpleasant side effects (other than death) are the possibilities of a seizure or

choking on one's own vomit, but by the time that happens, a person probably is not terribly conscious.

[LiveScience](#) [7] reported specifically on the effects of a fentanyl overdose. It says that an overdose occurs incredibly rapidly, within seconds or minutes. Additionally:

*The most common characteristic, described in 20 percent of the cases, was that the person's lips immediately turned blue, followed by gurgling sounds with breathing (16 percent of the cases), stiffening of the body or seizure-like activity (13 percent), foaming at the mouth (6 percent) and confusion or strange behavior before the person became unresponsive (6 percent), according to the report.*

Given the myriad ways in which we may possibly shuffle off this mortal coil -- from cancer and car crashes to Alzheimer's and strokes -- fentanyl overdose is not a bad way to die.

Whether one supports or opposes the death penalty, the debate should be based upon ethics and morality informed by evidence-based biomedical science, not distortions and half-truths.

*\*Note: This article is not meant to take a political stance in favor of or against the death penalty.*

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**Links**

[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lethal\\_injection#/media/File:SQ\\_Lethal\\_Injection\\_Room.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lethal_injection#/media/File:SQ_Lethal_Injection_Room.jpg)

[2] <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/pentobarbital-euthanasia-drug-used-in-oklahoma-execution-was-it-inhumane/>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/01/05/heroin-overdose-deaths-quadruple-among-older-millennials-10690>

[4] <https://news.vice.com/story/nevada-is-about-to-execute-a-guy-with-fentanyl>

[5] <https://www.aclu.org/issues/capital-punishment>

[6] [https://tonic.vice.com/en\\_us/article/a3dzyb/this-is-exactly-what-happens-when-you-overdose](https://tonic.vice.com/en_us/article/a3dzyb/this-is-exactly-what-happens-when-you-overdose)

[7] <https://www.livescience.com/58682-fentanyl-overdose-characteristics.html>