
Patient FAQ

Fentanyl Patch Return Program



What is the Fentanyl Patch Return Program?

A Fentanyl Patch Return Program is when a doctor, pharmacist and patient work together to promote the safe, effective and responsible use of fentanyl patches. In general, it applies a 'one in, one out' model, where you will be asked to return any patches you receive back to the pharmacy before you are able to receive more.

What is the doctor writing on my prescription?

Your doctor should direct the pharmacist to collect used or unused patches before dispensing the next set of patches. Your doctor may also put in place a three-way Narcotic Contract between themselves, you, and the pharmacy that outlines the conditions for safe, effective and responsible use of your fentanyl patch prescription. This contract may include a point about the Fentanyl Patch Return Program. This is intended to be a shared responsibility between the physicians and the pharmacists.

What if my pharmacist chooses to not follow the instructions of my doctor?

That decision should be discussed with you, the decision should be documented, and the doctor should be notified.

Why can't I just return my used patches to my doctor when I get my next prescription?

Doctors generally do not have a system set up for the safe disposal of hazardous wastes such as medications. Pharmacists do have a system for medication disposal available to them at no charge through the Ontario government. In addition, pharmacists are in a unique position as they see patients more often and are involved in handling new and discarded medications on a daily basis.

Why can't I just dispose of my patches at home?

Fentanyl patches, along with every other type of medication (pills, ointments, liquids, prescriptions, vitamins, over-the-counter drugs and herbals) are considered to be hazardous waste. This means they need to be safely disposed of to prevent poisonings, injuries, misuse and diversion while also protecting the environment. All pharmacies already have a system in place to carry out this safe disposal as described above.

What if I only bring back 8 out of 10 patches?

Then you only get 8 in the next refill/prescription and must return those before you receive the next prescription. You will be reminded of the need to return the meds; and if it happens again, you must see your doctor to decide if it is appropriate to continue the prescription as it is.

For my first prescription there will be only 9 out of 10 patches returned.

Yes, that is expected to be a one-time occurrence and should be documented.

How should the used patches be stored?

It is recommended that you stick the used patches onto a sheet of paper, in order (with no overlap) so that each patch can easily be recognized and accounted for. (See example of sheet attached)
You should store the sheet with used patches out of sight and out of the reach of children and/or pets. It should be treated with the same care and concern as other medications, which should ideally be stored in a secure, locked cabinet. Fentanyl can cause serious unwanted effects or fatal overdose if taken by children, pets, or adults who are not used to strong narcotic pain medicines. Make sure you store the used patches in a safe place.

Once returned to the pharmacy, the returned sheets with used patches will be placed into the pharmacy's drug disposal bin to be removed and destroyed on a regular basis.

What If I am going on vacation and need a larger supply of patches?

You must return the quantity of patches that you received in your last order. If you are receiving a larger quantity than usual, you must return the same number in order to receive the next lot, even if the next prescription is for a smaller quantity than the current prescription. The pharmacist will document the changes for appropriate record keeping.

As in all activities, pharmacists will use their discretion and professional judgment in patient care activities. In an example such as this, the pharmacist may choose to dispense one patch to the patient until the prescription and location of the used patches can be verified with the prescriber.

I get my medications delivered how will this affect me?

Pharmacy delivery personnel are considered agents of the pharmacy, and should be advised of the need to collect used patches from you. In a similar way in which they collect money, drug cards, expired medications, and other items such as signatures under the ONMMS, they can also be entrusted to collect and return used patches to the pharmacy.

As a best practice when delivering a Fentanyl Patch prescription, both you and the delivery personnel may sign the ONMMS delivery record to indicate that used patches were picked up from the patient for you.