



County of San Diego

JEFF COLLINS
DIRECTOR
San Diego County Fire
(619) 339-0283

PUBLIC SAFETY GROUP
SAN DIEGO COUNTY FIRE
SAN DIEGO COUNTY EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES OFFICE
5560 Overland Avenue, Suite 400, San Diego, CA 92123-1204
www.SanDiegoCountyEMS.com

ANDREW (ANDY) PARR
EMS ADMINISTRATOR
Deputy Director, Departmental Operations
(619) 285-6429

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FENTANYL DOSING CLARIFICATION (2024-2025 PROTOCOLS)

The San Diego County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Medical Director is providing protocol clarifications for fentanyl dosing in response to feedback received from the EMS community at the Prehospital Audit Committee (PAC) meeting on July 16, 2024. These clarifications are effective immediately and remain in place until July 1, 2025. We plan to assess the use of weight-based dosing for all controlled analgesic medications during the next protocol revision cycle.

Pain medication should be titrated to patient need: *start low, go slow*. Patients who are elderly, opioid-naive, or have impaired respiratory or mental status may require lower initial and repeat doses. Continuously monitor the adequacy of respiratory status, including assessing waveform capnography as indicated.

Question: How do we determine fentanyl doses for adult and pediatric patients with moderate to severe pain? Specifically, what is the meaning of “**up to**” in the current protocols?

Answer:

Adult ([S-141](#): “*up to 100 mcg IV*” and “*up to 50 mcg IN*”)

- An initial dose of 100 mcg IV or 50 mcg IN is well tolerated in most adults. In opioid-naive or elderly patients, start with a lower dose. For elderly patients, begin with 25 mcg and titrate up in increments of 25 mcg to achieve pain relief without respiratory depression.¹

Pediatric (**Patients >36 kg only**, [P-117 Turquoise](#): “*up to 100 mcg IV*” and “*up to 50 mcg IN*”)

- Rather than administering the maximum dose, use weight-based dosing ([P-115A](#)) for both initial and repeat doses. It is acceptable to round doses (up or down) to the nearest 5 mcg.

MEDICATION	DOSE	MAXIMUM SINGLE DOSE
Fentanyl Citrate IN ≥10 kg	1.5 mcg/kg	50 mcg
Fentanyl Citrate IV ≥10 kg	1 mcg/kg	100 mcg

Thank you for your continued contribution to the safety and well-being of our emergency patients.

Sincerely,

Kristi L. Koenig, MD, FACEP, FIFEM, FAEMS, Medical Director
San Diego County Emergency Medical Services Office
San Diego County Fire

cc: Andrew Parr, EMS Administrator

¹ Often, 25 mcg of fentanyl IV is sufficient for pain relief in elderly patients who are not chronically taking opioids.