



Practice-Based Guidance and Tips

From the Massachusetts Drug Supply Data Stream (MADDS) and StreetCheck Community Drug Checking Programs

Cannabis containing fentanyl, xylazine or other substances has not been confirmed but media stories may lead to questions about contamination of all substances, including cannabis. If you have questions like this as drug checkers and are looking for more guidance, please refer to the information below.

Information on Drug Checking Samples

Blotter Paper

Can we as a Drug Checking program accept blotter paper/LSD samples?

You can always accept a blotter paper/LSD sample but it cannot always go out for off-site testing! You may perform any initial testing analysis (FTIR, FTS/BTS/XTS). If the sample has been tested initially and you would like to send it for off-site testing please check that it meets ONE of the following criteria:

1. Adverse health event? Fatal or Non-fatal Overdose associated with use
2. Suspected to have been contaminated with another substance: Fentanyl, Synthetic Cannabinoids (K2, spice, etc.), Cocaine, etc?
3. Don't prompt for this, but if the participant says that they have tested positive on a drug test for another substance (Suboxone, opioid, etc), when they report having only used LSD
4. Positive Test Strip Result (FTS, BTS, XTS)
5. FTIR analysis produces an unexpected active substance
 - a. Blotter paper typically shows as cellulose from the paper itself
 - b. If you are able to identify an unexpected active substance (cocaine, fentanyl, etc.) this sample should be sent for further analysis

Cannabis

Can we as a Drug Checking program accept cannabis samples?

You can always accept and test a cannabis sample onsite, but we do not always recommend sending out cannabis samples for off-site testing! You may perform any initial testing analysis (FTS/BTS/XTS, FTIR). If the sample has been tested initially and you would like to send it for off-site testing please check that it meets at least ONE of the following criteria:

1. Adverse health event? Fatal or Non-fatal Overdose associated with use
2. Suspected to have been contaminated with another substance: Fentanyl, Synthetic Cannabinoids (K2, spice, etc.), Cocaine, etc?
3. Don't prompt for this, but if the participant says that they have tested positive on a drug test for another substance (Suboxone, opioid, etc), when they report having only used cannabis
4. *Positive Test Strip Result (FTS, BTS, XTS)
5. FTIR analysis produces an unexpected active substance
 - a. Cannabis typically shows as cellulose from the paper itself
 - b. If you are able to identify an unexpected active substance (cocaine, fentanyl, etc.) this sample should be sent for further analysis

Please check with Brandeis before sending for lab testing! Please email us (Becca/Cole/Abby) with the sample ID and the reason mentioned above that you think the sample warrants further analysis. We will respond ASAP with a response about further testing.

*Please see the section below for instructions on testing cannabis using FTS.

Testing methods/further details:

Direction for testing cannabis using a FTS: By Dr. Marya Lieberman



Bottle cap art by Enrico Maggino

MADDs is a state-funded collaboration between Brandeis University researchers, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, various town police departments, and local harm reduction agencies. For more information, scan the QR code, visit streetcheck.org, or contact us at maddsbrandeis@gmail.com.



Question: Can FTS be used to test cannabis for fentanyl presence?

To 0.15 g of cannabis (about 1 rounded teaspoon) was added 0.002 mg of fentanyl (in aqueous solution aka in water). This quantity, 2 micrograms, would probably be enough for someone to see; a low-dose transdermal fentanyl patch is designed to deliver 12 micrograms/hour of fentanyl to the circulation. After the water dried, we add another 1 mL of water and ran a FTS. The control sample was just cannabis. Although the water turned olive green and that color showed up all along the FTS, the FTS still gave a clean negative for the control cannabis and a clean positive for the cannabis sample with the fentanyl.

Each tube has 0.15 g cannabis and 1 ml water.

Tube A (on the left) has 2.0 micrograms of fentanyl. Tube B (on the right) does not have any fentanyl. The water in both tubes turned green-yellow and that color will appear on the FTS. The color did not affect the FTS result.

Answer: The FTS can detect fentanyl at low levels in cannabis.

The drug supply is unpredictable. When possible, try to avoid using alone so that someone can call for help in the event of an overdose. Always carry naloxone and check with your local harm reduction program for availability.