



Identifying the Presence of Harm Reduction Supplies at Bars in Providence, Rhode, Island

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Overview

The aim of this project was to identify if bars and restaurants in Providence, Rhode Island are carrying naloxone and fentanyl test strips. This study consisted of a survey of 42 bars in Providence, which is roughly a 10.5% sample of the total number of bars.

Background

- 434 fatal overdoses occurred in Providence in 2022, half involved cocaine. ¹
- Presently, the opioid epidemic is now in its fourth wave, marked by the cooccurring use of psychostimulants and opioids. ^{2,3}
- In some instances, psychostimulants and other nonopioid substances are being contaminated with fentanyl, which can cause fatal overdose. The Rhode Island drug surveillance program testRI determined that 10% of stimulant samples analyzed contained significant amounts of fentanyl, and 30.8% of contained trace amounts of fentanyl. ⁴
- Cocaine is the most prevalently consumed psychostimulant in the United States, and since 2012, the prevalence has been increasing. In the United States, 75.95% of adults who self-reported using cocaine in the past year, also reported binge-drinking within the past month. ⁵
- Research suggests that patrons of bars are more likely to use cocaine, since cocaine is most often used in bars, rather than at home or other settings ⁶
- Substance use is not only prevalent among bar patrons, but also among staff. Workers in the restaurant industry have the highest prevalence of substance of any occupation. ⁷
- Food and drink is a major industry in Rhode Island, with 12% of Rhode Islanders working restaurant industry jobs as of 2022. ⁸
- It was questioned whether bars were carrying opioid harm reduction supplies such as naloxone to reverse or prevent potential overdoses, and fentanyl test strips to test for fentanyl contamination. Of particular interest to this study were fentanyl test strips. Most of the individuals responsible for the increased prevalence of cocaine use are adults aged 18 to 35, who use powdered cocaine infrequently. ⁵
- Studies have shown that after being informed about the dangers of fentanyl contamination, individuals aged 18 to 35 in Rhode Island demonstrate a high willingness to utilize fentanyl test strips. ⁹
- In contrast, individuals who use opioids intravenously presently show little interest in utilizing fentanyl test strips now that fentanyl has dominated the illicit opioid supply. ¹⁰

Study Design

- Providence is Rhode Island's capital and largest city, with approximately 400 bars and restaurants possessing liquor licenses in the city limits. ¹¹
- Survey data was collected from bars, and restaurants with full bars, in Providence. The survey asked if the bar kept naloxone and/or fentanyl test strips on the premises. In total, 42 bars, or roughly 10.5% of the establishments possessing liquor licenses in Providence, were surveyed.
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample depended on location and services provided. The establishment must fall within the 02903, 02906, or 02909 zip codes. The establishment must have a full bar that serves liquor, which includes restaurants and nightclubs with full bars. If the establishment served beer and wine only, or did not sell alcohol for onsite consumption, they were excluded from the survey.
- The method of data collection was to enter establishments and ask an employee if any naloxone was kept on the premises. If the employee stated that naloxone was kept on the premises, they were then asked if fentanyl test strips were kept on the premises. If the employee responded positively to either question, they were then asked where these products were stored.
- Some bar employees, unprompted, expressed interest in keeping more harm reduction supplies on hand. This information was also recorded

Results

Harm Reduction Supplies	Number of Bars	Percent of Bars Surveyed
Naloxone and Fentanyl Test Strips	4	9.5%
Naloxone Only	17	40.5%
Neither	11	26.2%
Unsure	10	23.8%
Location Inaccessible	42	100%
Unprompted interest in more supplies	5	11.9%

Conclusion

- Of the bars surveyed, 26.2% (n=11) of establishments confirmed that they did not carry either naloxone or fentanyl test strips, and 23.8% (n=10) were unsure whether they kept any naloxone or fentanyl test strips on the premises.
- Of the bars surveyed 40.5% (n=17) carried naloxone only, and 9.5% (n=4) of the bars surveyed carried both fentanyl test strips and naloxone.
- Of the establishments that carried naloxone, or naloxone and fentanyl test strips, 100% kept these items in a location that is inaccessible to all patrons and some staff, such a first aid kit, in a drawer behind the bar, in a storage room, or in a back office.
- Bars and restaurants in Providence are not making harm reduction supplies available to the public.
- Half of bars did not report carrying naloxone
- All bars that kept naloxone and/or fentanyl test strips, kept these items in an inaccessible location.
- Fentanyl test strips are not being widely carried by bars in Providence.
- Some bars and restaurants (11.9%, n=5), expressed interest in keeping more harm reduction supplies on the premises.
- Recommendations for further research include a case study to explore the effectiveness of distributing harm reduction supplies and educational materials to bars and restaurants in Providence, especially related to fentanyl test strips.
- Another area for future research is a qualitative study that can explore the perceived barriers and motivators for participating in harm reduction.

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