

# New York nightlife venues recruited in effort to prevent overdoses due to fentanyl

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Bars and nightclubs are a promising site for efforts to increase awareness of the risk of opioid overdose due to fentanyl-laced cocaine, suggests a study in the *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice (JPHMP)*.

"Rapid dissemination of the campaign allowed us to reach people at potential risk of [overdose](#) in a short time period following identification of fentanyl in the [cocaine](#) supply," according to the pilot study by Bennett Allen, MA, and colleagues of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Their pilot study appears as part of a *JPHMP* special issue on public health approaches to the opioid epidemic.

## Bars and Nightclubs Help Raise Awareness of Fentanyl Overdose Risk

A potent synthetic opioid, fentanyl has become a major contributor to deaths from [opioid overdose](#). Although fentanyl is also found in heroin, there is special concern about its potential to cause overdose in cocaine users, who may not have developed tolerance to opioids. Casual cocaine users are also less likely to be knowledgeable about opioid overdose risk, or about the "rescue" medication naloxone.

To raise awareness of fentanyl and educate [cocaine users](#) about overdose prevention, DOHMH developed and tested a public health education campaign, focusing on NYC nightlife venues. "Research indicates that bars are a common venue for cocaine use," according to the authors.

The [pilot study](#) targeted bars, nightclubs, and music venues in NYC's Lower East Side, a busy nightlife area. DOHMH distributed posters and drink coasters with educational messages about the presence of fentanyl in the cocaine supply and the associated risk of [opioid](#) overdose. Owners of 23 venues—about half of those approached—agreed to participate.

In a survey, 87 bar owners or managers had heard about [fentanyl](#), only 43 percent knew about naloxone. Ninety-one percent of owners/managers were interested in naloxone training for bar staff in overdose prevention, including naloxone and information on how to use it.

Despite its small scale, the DOHMH program generated substantial coverage on local media and social media. [A single photo posted on Twitter](#) was disseminated by 20,000 users over six months.

The study builds on previous research showing that sexual risk reduction education programs can be delivered effectively in nightlife settings. "Public health authorities could consider similar campaigns to deliver prevention messages to individuals at risk of overdose," Mr. Allen and coauthors conclude.

**More information:** Bennett Allen et al. Delivering Opioid Overdose Prevention in Bars and Nightclubs, *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* (2019). DOI: [10.1097/PHH.0000000000001014](https://doi.org/10.1097/PHH.0000000000001014)

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