

Fentanyl

A Deadly Drug Threat



Fentanyl is the single deadliest drug threat our nation has ever encountered. Fentanyl is everywhere. From large metropolitan areas to rural America, no community is safe from this poison.

~DEA Administrator Anne Milgram

What Is Fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic (man-made) opioid that is approximately 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illegally made fentanyl.

Pharmaceutical fentanyl was created in 1959 and is legally manufactured in the U.S. It is prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain, especially after surgery and for advanced-stage cancer.

Illegally made fentanyl (IMF) is distributed through illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect. A bipartisan federal commission found that fentanyl is being made mostly in labs in Mexico from chemicals shipped primarily from China. It is inexpensive, widely available, highly addictive, and comes in a variety of colors, shapes, and forms, including powder and pills. Brightly colored fentanyl products resembling candy are often referred to as rainbow fentanyl. The DEA believes this may be an attempt to disguise trafficking of the drug and to target youth.

Fentanyl can be injected, snorted/sniffed, smoked, taken orally by pill or tablet, and dropped onto blotter paper. It only takes a very small dose of

fentanyl (2 milligrams) to be lethal, which is about the amount that can fit on the tip of a pencil. The 2022 DEA fentanyl seizures represent over 387.9 million deadly doses. The DEA Special Agent in Charge Mark Michalek states that, "Fentanyl in all its forms and variations is killing our children."



PREVENTION SERVICES

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CDC REMINDER:

Illicit drugs do not come with an ingredients list. Many contain deadly doses of fentanyl.

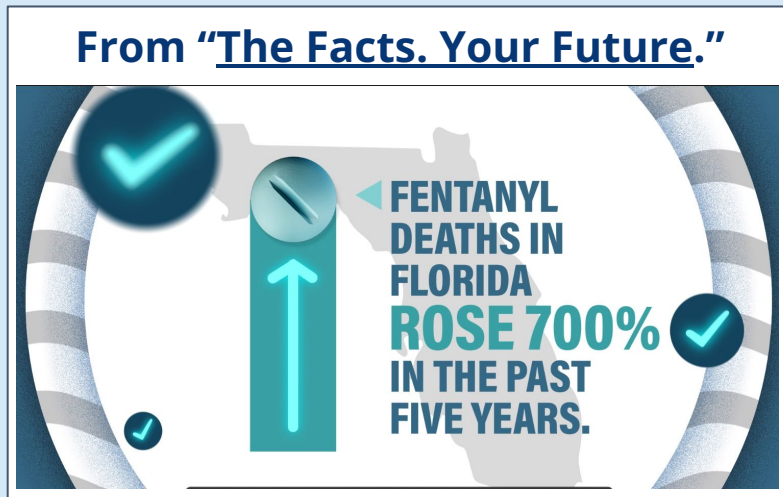
MEDICAL FENTANYL	ILLEGALLY MADE FENTANYL
Made in a sterile factory	Made in unsanitary conditions
Carefully blended	Sloppy mixing
Dose is precise and consistent	Dose is random and variable
Carefully administered by doctors	Laced into other drugs
Legitimate medical uses	Increases drug dealer profits
Death is uncommon when taken as prescribed by a doctor	Involved in the majority of US drug deaths in recent years

Fentanyl Epidemic

The United States is suffering the deadliest drug epidemic in its history. In the 12-month period ending in January 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported drug overdoses killed more than 107,000 individuals nationwide, more than gun and auto deaths combined. In a span of just a few years, drug deaths have doubled. Over two-thirds of these U.S. overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl. PBS NewsHour reported that experts believe deaths have surged, not because of an increase in the number of people using, but because the drugs are so powerful and the fact that fentanyl is laced into so many other illicit drugs.

Fentanyl now kills around 200 Americans every day, according to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). To address this crisis, the U.S. government is not only deploying law enforcement to crack down on fentanyl dealers but also taking steps to prevent and treat substance use and the harm it produces.

With accidental overdoses increasing at an alarming rate, parents and caregivers must talk with teens about the risks of fentanyl and empower them to make smart decisions when it comes to substance use. Parents can help protect their children against drug use by staying informed and giving them the facts about fentanyl before they face a risky situation.



Signs of Fentanyl Use

You may notice changes in your teenager’s behavior if they develop a fentanyl addiction. Some of the most common signs and symptoms of fentanyl addiction include:

- goose bumps on skin
- mood swings
- isolation from loved ones
- changes in sleeping patterns, weight, and appetite
- dilated pupils
- fatigue
- lying
- frequent sweating
- noticeable decline in work or academic performance
- poor coordination and shakiness
- asking to borrow money or stealing

Although these may not be dangerous, they show that your child has enough of an opioid use problem to need treatment. If you suspect your teen may be using fentanyl or other drugs, make sure they do not have drugs available. That means searching their room, backpack, car, and the entire home. If teens think they are going to have to go to treatment, sometimes they'll try to use up what they have and could overdose.

Counterfeit Pills

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has alerted the public of a sharp nationwide increase in the deadliness of fentanyl-laced fake prescription pills. International and domestic criminal drug networks are mass-producing and flooding the U.S. with fentanyl powder and lethal counterfeit pills containing fentanyl and methamphetamine. These fake pills are made to look like other popular prescription opioids and stimulants. According to the DEA, six out of ten of the fentanyl laced fake prescription pills analyzed in 2022 contained a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl. These have been identified in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Drug traffickers are mixing fentanyl with other illicit drugs due to its extreme potency, which makes drugs cheaper, more powerful, more addictive, and more dangerous. These all create a much greater profit margin. Because new addicts are being created regularly, the loss of a few users is inconsequential. As users develop a tolerance, dealers may up the amount of fentanyl they put in their pills, unintentionally killing those who have not built up the same tolerance. Many victims who have survived fentanyl poisoning were unaware they ingested fentanyl.



Young people may be more vulnerable to this deadly counterfeit pill trend, as they are more likely to obtain the prescription pills from online pharmacies or other illegal means. There have been several known instances of kids purchasing illegal substances via social media. Reports have come from at least 15 states of counterfeit pills posing as Xanax, Percocet, or Oxycontin which instead contain a lethal amount of fentanyl being sold on Snapchat.

The DEA's "[One Pill Can Kill](#)" campaign was created to help inform the public about the dangers of counterfeit pills. It has many resources regarding this growing problem, and warn the public that pills purchased outside of a licensed pharmacy are illegal, dangerous, and potentially deadly.

Smartphones and Drug Deals

Drug traffickers are using smartphones to market, buy, sell, and deliver illegal drugs, including deadly fake prescription pills that may contain fentanyl. Since fake pills look just like pills bought through a pharmacy, unsuspecting buyers think they are buying the real thing.

Dealers advertise on social media platforms, taking advantage of features like disappearing posts, and use emojis and code words for various illicit drugs in order to elude law enforcement. Buyers use direct messaging or comment on a post, and then dealers use an encrypted messaging app to arrange the drug deal. Payment is made through one-click apps like Venmo, Zelle, Cash App, and Remity.

The Drug Enforcement Administration has found drug traffickers using social media to conduct illicit drug sales throughout the nation: across urban, suburban, and rural communities. This trend means that smartphone apps have enabled criminal drug networks to infiltrate every area of our lives. Today, there are about 9,300 websites selling drugs illegally on the dark web. Tools like these below are the latest effort by the DEA and can help keep parents and loved ones informed by equipping them to more easily recognize the signs of prescription or illicit substance abuse.

"It was as easy as ordering a pizza... He delivered right to our house."

~Matt C., whose daughter died after taking a deadly pill bought on social media.

(Solon, 2021)

[Click for Emoji Code Guide](#)

[Click for Emoji Code Poster](#)

[Click for DEA Drug Code Word Guide](#)

Talk to Your Children

Because even a tiny amount of fentanyl can be fatal, it is more important than ever for parents to start talking with their children about the dangers of substance abuse, even as early as seven years old. A good place to begin is by asking your child what they know and what they believe about drug use. It is recommended that we discuss how to recognize risks of fentanyl as well as talk about practical ways to reduce harm.

These are three things to focus on while talking with your children:

1. You are never too young to make choices that are good for you. Help them understand how important it is to make healthy decisions and how they can do so.
2. All drugs are potentially dangerous. This is to invalidate the myth that some drugs are “safer” than others, since fentanyl is turning up in all types of drugs, not just opioids.
3. Never mix drugs with alcohol. Although parents should make it clear that abstaining from all drug use is by far the safest strategy, it is important for those who may experiment to know that they should never mix drugs with alcohol. Also emphasize to them to never be afraid to call 911 if anything ever goes wrong.

For more information on how to protect your child from drug use, go to:

[SAMHSA’s Talk. They Hear You.](#)

Harm Reduction

When it comes to strategies to prevent fentanyl overdoses, the CDC believes that we must take into account the realities, experiences, and perspectives of those at risk of overdose. Reducing risk is an important part of these strategies. The use of naloxone and fentanyl test strips, and 911 Good Samaritan laws are examples of harm reduction strategies to prevent opioid overdoses.

Below are links for more information on these strategies and more.

[CDC Evidence-based Strategies](#)

[CDC Stop Overdose](#)

[HHS Overdose Prevention Strategy](#)

Overdose Signs

Recognizing the signs of an opioid overdose can save a life. It is important to act fast.

Signs of Opioid Overdose



Small, constricted “pinpoint” pupils



Choking or gurgling sounds



Falling asleep or loss of consciousness



Limp Body



Slow, shallow breathing



Pale blue lips or nails

What To Do

It may be hard to tell whether a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you aren’t sure, treat it like an overdose—you could save a life.

- **Call 911 Immediately.**
- **Administer naloxone, if available.**
- **Try to keep the person awake and breathing.**
- **Lay the person on their side to prevent choking.**
- **Stay with the person until emergency assistance arrives.**