



Drug Enforcement Administration St. Louis Division

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEA Issues Public Safety Alert on Sharp Increase in Fake Prescription Pills Containing Fentanyl and Meth

DEA Warns that International and Domestic Criminal Drug Networks are Flooding the United States with Lethal Counterfeit Pills

ST. LOUIS – Today, the Drug Enforcement Administration issued a Public Safety Alert warning Americans of the alarming increase in the lethality and availability of fake prescription pills containing fentanyl and methamphetamine. DEA’s Public Safety Alert, the first in six years, seeks to raise public awareness of a significant nationwide surge in counterfeit pills that are mass-produced by criminal drug networks in labs, deceptively marketed as legitimate prescription pills, and are killing unsuspecting Americans at an unprecedented rate.

These counterfeit pills have been seized by DEA in every U.S. state in unprecedented quantities. More than 9.5 million counterfeit pills were seized so far this year, which is more than the last two years combined. DEA laboratory testing reveals a dramatic rise in the number of counterfeit pills containing at least two milligrams of fentanyl, which is considered a lethal dose. A deadly dose of fentanyl is small enough to fit on the tip of a pencil.

Counterfeit pills are illegally manufactured by criminal drug networks and are made to look like real prescription opioid medications such as oxycodone (Oxycontin®, Percocet®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), and alprazolam (Xanax®); or stimulants like amphetamines (Adderall®). Fake prescription pills are widely accessible and often sold on social media and e-commerce platforms – making them available to anyone with a smartphone, including minors.

“The United States is facing an unprecedented crisis of overdose deaths fueled by illegally manufactured fentanyl and methamphetamine,” said Anne Milgram, Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration. “Counterfeit pills that contain these dangerous and extremely addictive drugs are more lethal and more accessible than ever before. In fact, DEA lab analyses reveal that two out of every five fake pills with fentanyl contain a potentially lethal dose. DEA is focusing resources on taking down the violent drug traffickers causing the greatest harm and posing the greatest threat to the safety and health of Americans. Today, we are alerting the public to this danger so that people have the information they need to protect themselves and their children.”

“DEA St. Louis Division has seized 179 kilograms of fentanyl this year, nearly as much as we seized in the previous two years,” said Special Agent in Charge Todd Zimmerman, head of DEA St. Louis Division, which includes the states of Missouri and Kansas, and southern Illinois. “That’s hundreds of thousands of pills that drug trafficking organizations never pressed into a pill that might kill someone. They don’t care about human life. We do, and DEA investigators are working hard to stop fentanyl from reaching our neighborhoods and taking more lives.”

DEA St. Louis Division fentanyl seizures for the last four years:

FY2018 – 36 kilograms

FY2019 – 104 kilograms

FY2020 – 82 kilograms

FY2021 – 179 kilograms

The vast majority of counterfeit pills brought into the United States are produced in Mexico, and China is supplying chemicals for the manufacturing of fentanyl in Mexico.

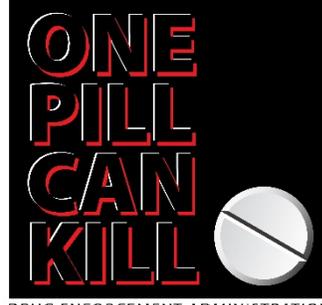
The drug overdose crisis in the United States is a serious public safety threat with rates currently reaching the highest level in history. Drug traffickers are using fake pills to exploit the opioid crisis and prescription drug misuse in the United States, bringing overdose deaths and violence to American communities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 93,000 people died of a drug overdose in the United States last year. Fentanyl, the synthetic opioid most commonly found in counterfeit pills, is the primary driver of this alarming increase in overdose deaths.

Drug trafficking is also inextricably linked to violence. This year alone, DEA seized more than 2,700 firearms in connection with drug trafficking investigations – a 30% increase since 2019. DEA remains steadfast in its mission to protect our communities, enforce U.S. drug laws, and bring to justice the foreign and domestic criminals sourcing, producing, and distributing illicit drugs, including counterfeit pills.

This alert does **not** apply to legitimate pharmaceutical medications prescribed by medical professionals and dispensed by licensed pharmacists. The legitimate prescription supply chain is not impacted. Anyone filling a prescription at a licensed pharmacy can be confident that the medications they receive are safe when taken as directed by a medical professional.

The issuance of today’s Public Safety Alert coincides with the launch of DEA’s One Pill Can Kill Public Awareness Campaign to educate the public of the dangers of counterfeit pills. DEA urges all Americans to be vigilant and aware of the dangers of counterfeit pills, and to take only medications prescribed by a medical professional and dispensed by a licensed pharmacist. DEA warns that pills purchased outside of a licensed pharmacy are illegal, dangerous, and potentially lethal. For more information, visit <https://www.dea.gov/onepill> or scan the QR code below.

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