

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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DEA Issues Warning Over Counterfeit Prescription Pills from Mexico



DATE:	November 14, 2019
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Rachel Levine, MD, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	DEA Issues Warning Over Counterfeit Prescription Pills from Mexico
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	Statewide
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL
EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE
FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE
LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE
PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Summary

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) is alerting health care providers and the public of dangerous counterfeit pills killing Americans.
- Mexican drug cartels are manufacturing mass quantities of counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl, a dangerous synthetic opioid that is lethal in minute doses, for distribution throughout North America.
- Based on a sampling of tablets seized nationwide between January and March 2019, DEA found that 27 percent contained potentially lethal doses of fentanyl.
- Clinicians who obtain any counterfeit products are encouraged to call and report it to the Pennsylvania Poison Centers at 1-800-222-1222.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is forwarding the following press release to healthcare providers, “**DEA issues warning over counterfeit prescription pills from Mexico**” from the Drug Enforcement Administration.

DEA issues warning over counterfeit prescription pills from Mexico

PHILADELPHIA – The Drug Enforcement Administration is alerting the public of dangerous counterfeit pills killing Americans. Mexican drug cartels are manufacturing mass quantities of counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl, a dangerous synthetic opioid that is lethal in minute doses, for distribution throughout North America.

Based on a sampling of tablets seized nationwide between January and March 2019, DEA found that 27 percent contained potentially lethal doses of fentanyl.

“Capitalizing on the opioid epidemic and prescription drug abuse in the United States, drug trafficking organizations are now sending counterfeit pills made with fentanyl in bulk to the United States for distribution,” said DEA Acting Administrator Uttam Dhillon. “Counterfeit pills that contain fentanyl and fentanyl-laced heroin are responsible for thousands of opioid-related deaths in the United States each year.”

Fentanyl and other highly potent synthetic opioids remain the primary driver behind the ongoing opioid crisis, with fentanyl involved in more deaths than any other illicit drug.

“The pills pictured here are made to look identical to pharmaceutical oxycodone tablets but present an increased danger due to the potency of fentanyl,” said Jonathan A. Wilson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA’s Philadelphia Field Division. “These counterfeit pills are an example of the evolving nature of the fentanyl threat in the region. DEA remains committed to investigating and disrupting the drug-trafficking organizations importing and distributing these dangerous substances.”

A lethal dose of fentanyl is estimated to be about two milligrams, but can vary based on an individual’s body size, tolerance, amount of previous usage and other factors. The full Fentanyl Signature Profiling Program Report on the recent drug sampling and testing is available here:

https://admin.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/DEA_Fentanyl_Signature_Profiling_Program_Report-Oct-2019.pdf

For more information, please contact DEA Public Information Officer/Supervisory Special Agent Patrick J. Trainor at (571) 362-5391 or patrick.j.trainor@usdoj.gov

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Examples of counterfeit pills seized by DEA:



Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of November 14, 2019 but may be modified in the future.