

Just One Pill Can Kill

The real dangers of fake pills

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has issued a public safety alert, as a dangerous flood of counterfeit prescription pills is proving deadly. This is the first DEA alert of its kind in six years, highlighting the seriousness of the situation.

The alert comes after a spike in deaths among teens and adults who bought what they believed was a prescription pill, such as OxyContin, Xanax or Adderall, that turned out to be a counterfeit pill containing a deadly dose of fentanyl, which is one hundred times more potent than morphine.

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Cheryl Crowe, Vice President, OSF HealthCare Behavioral Health

“Fentanyl is a powerful analgesic and anesthetic agent, so when they take this it's too much. They overdose and they die, because what they think they're taking is very different from what they're actually taking.” (:13)

According to the DEA, these deadly counterfeit pills are mass produced in labs illegally, then marketed to look like real prescription drugs. The agency says it has seized more than nine and a half million fake pills this year alone, which is more than the last two years combined. Alarming, two out of every five counterfeit pills with fentanyl seized and tested in the U.S. contained enough of the drug to kill.

Elevating the concern, says Crowe, is that these pills are widely available online and often sold through social media. She says parents need to be aware and to talk to their kids immediately about the real danger they pose. Just one pill can be deadly.

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“I think it's a conversation to have with your children about these substances, because obviously kids can order these without parental consent as long as they have the money to pay for them, and they don't understand what they're receiving. A lot of adults don't understand that as well. So these are conversations that we need to have with our elderly, with our children and our families, because we're so used to ordering things online now, that it becomes very second nature. And this is a very dangerous way to do it.” (:28)

Dozens of stories have been in the news recently about young adults and teens dying after taking fentanyl-laced pills. The [Partnership for Safe Medicines](#) has compiled heartbreaking accounts from 26 states. The statistics are sobering, and are often surprising, as kids without histories of drug abuse or even drug use are falling victim.

Crowe says the bottom line is – if you weren't prescribed a pill from a provider, or if you don't know where it came from, don't take it, and don't let a friend or family member take it. The risk is too great.

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“I think the message here is if you're not getting it from your pharmacy or your physician, it's not a safe medication to take, if you're ordering anything online. There are risks, and often, often, often, those are not the substances you think you're ordering. So, it's never a safe route to go.” (:18)

The DEA has more information about the influx of counterfeit pills in the United States, including parental resources at [dea.gov/onepill](https://www.dea.gov/onepill).

Learn more about substance use services at OSF HealthCare at [osfhealthcare.org](https://www.osfhealthcare.org).