

Fact Check: FAKE PILLS

The U.S. overdose crisis has reached a devastating new height with over 100,000 people dying last year from drug overdoses. **Increasingly, these tragic deaths are being linked to fake pills.**

Millions of counterfeit, or fake, prescription medications are being seized by law enforcement agents all across the country. In fact, more than 20 million fake pills were seized in 2021 alone.

Criminal drug traffickers mass-produce these fake pills in illegal labs and then sell them online or through social media. They are made to look exactly like real prescription medicines such as Oxycotin, Xanax, or Adderall. People buy them believing that they are the same pills you would get from the doctor.



But a lot of these fake pills actually contain different, unapproved ingredients. They may be produced in unsanitary conditions, and are not tested for safety or purity. Many are laced with dangerous – and sometimes deadly – amounts of other drugs including a drug called *fentanyl*.

"According to DEA lab testing: 2 out of every 5 pills with fentanyl contain a potentially lethal dose."

--U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency



THE BLUE RIDGE POISON CENTER AT UVA HEALTH
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What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic *opioid*, or type of prescription painkiller. It is 100 times stronger than morphine. Fentanyl was originally developed to treat pain in cancer patients. Effects of fentanyl may include relaxation, euphoria, extreme drowsiness, dizziness, nausea and vomiting.



Two milligrams of fentanyl--shown here on the tip of a pencil--could be deadly. (Photo: www.dea.gov)

As little as 2 milligrams—about the size of a few grains of salt—could be an overdose. Overdoses can cause a person's breathing to become too slow or stop altogether, leading to brain damage or death.

What does a fentanyl overdose look like? Opioids like fentanyl cause sedation and slowed breathing. At high doses, a person's breathing could become too slow—or stop altogether—leading to brain damage and death. If you see even one of the overdose signs listed below, call 9-1-1 immediately. This could save a life. Never leave an overdosed person to "sleep it off."



OVERDOSE SIGNS

- Pinpoint pupils
- Shallow or stopped breathing.
- Person won't wake up, even if you shake or yell at them.
- Blue lips, skin, or fingernails. If a person has darker skin, these may be gray.

Naloxone (brand name *Narcan*) is a drug that can temporarily reverse the effects of opioid overdose. If you have Narcan and are trained to use it, it can save a life. ALWAYS call 9-1-1 anyway, even if the overdosed person wakes up. Narcan's effects could wear off before the effects of the opioid.