

CENTER FOR HOMELAND SECURITY & IMMIGRATION

FENTANYL Q&A: THE PILLS THAT ARE PLAGUING OUR POPULATION

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10 QUESTIONS: 10 ANSWERS

01 / What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid originally intended to be used in medical settings. It is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. Contraband fentanyl and its precursor chemicals manufactured by China and smuggled across our southern border by the Mexican cartels are now making headlines for the massive spike in deaths in communities across our Nation.

02 / Where does fentanyl come from?

Most of the fentanyl circulating in America is [manufactured in China and smuggled in by Mexican cartels across the Southern border](#). A [significant amount](#) also enters through U.S.

ports of entry via international mail. The current failed border strategy of the Biden Administration generates billions of dollars for the cartels as they can smuggle drugs and people across the border at record levels.

03 / How is fentanyl falling into the hands of young Americans?

Parents need to be alert that criminal cartels and other bad actors are targeting young Americans, including by offering pills on [social media](#), which are reportedly very easy to obtain. One of the most alarming parts of this epidemic is the brightly colored pills and powder—known [as rainbow fentanyl](#). Fentanyl has been found in [Legos](#) and [candy](#), likely by drug dealers trying to smuggle pills without detection from law enforcement.

04 / How much fentanyl is a lethal dose?

Fentanyl is the deadliest drug encountered in our Nation's history, and it takes just a small amount for someone to overdose within minutes. A mere 2 mg of fentanyl—less than a *grain* of sugar—is a [potentially lethal dose](#). Despite such a small amount being potentially lethal, drug traffickers package fentanyl by the kilogram and a single kilogram—about the size of a cantaloupe—which has the [potential to kill up to 500,000 Americans](#).

05 / How are Americans dying from fentanyl?

Almost all deaths attributed to fentanyl are overdoses from illicitly manufactured synthetic fentanyl—*not* from legal prescription fentanyl. Fentanyl is becoming known as the "[silent killer](#)," as stories of young people unknowingly taking drugs laced with fentanyl are tragically dying. For example, someone may ingest what they think is a "normal" amount of xanax or heroin but immediately lose consciousness and stop breathing due to the potency of the fentanyl it was laced with.

06 / How many Americans are dying?

Fentanyl is responsible for [more deaths](#) than any other drug, with the rates of death steeply rising over the past few years. The CDC reports loss of life linked to fentanyl and similar synthetic opioids surged by over 20% last year, twice the number of [meth overdoses](#).

The number of lethal synthetic opioid overdoses (primarily made up by fentanyl) in 2021 was 71,238 — surpassing the number of U.S. casualties during the entire Vietnam war. It's been reported that 136 people die every single day from opioid abuse in the U.S. alone.

07 / How much fentanyl is in our country?

There is a staggering amount of deadly fentanyl within our Nation's borders; enough was caught crossing the border in 2021 to kill 2.5 billion people — or every American 7 times over. In just four months, 10 million pills and nearly a thousand pounds of powdered fentanyl were seized by the DEA in communities nationwide, which is the equivalent of 36 million deadly doses. Far more fentanyl is believed to have entered our communities undetected by Border Patrol agents.

08 / How can you tell if a drug is synthetic or laced with fentanyl?

You can't. Counterfeit pills can only be identified by a medical professional, and the difference between prescription medication and its deadly counterpart is not obvious enough to the naked eye. An estimated 40% of counterfeit prescription pills may have a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl. Last year, over 20 million counterfeit prescription pills laced with fentanyl were seized, which is more than during the prior two years combined.

09 / Why is fentanyl used by drug producers?

Fentanyl is more potent than typical street drugs but is also manufactured at a lower cost per dose. This means it is an ideal “cutting agent,” used to dilute more expensive drugs, which can be sold at the same price. Though purchases of pure fentanyl are rare, drug dealers and distributors easily add it to other drugs, putting unsuspecting users at risk of an overdose. The DEA estimates that 4 in 10 drugs with fentanyl contain a lethal dose.

10 / How can we end the fentanyl crisis?

The fentanyl crisis represents a new wave of the ongoing opioid public health emergency that needs to be combated on the supply side and demand side. On the supply side, DHS needs to implement new policies that secure the border and prevent drugs and illegal aliens from entering our country. China needs to be held accountable for its role in manufacturing this deadly drug and allowing it to exit the country. On the demand side, Americans need to understand the dangers of fentanyl and the increasing likelihood that it may be laced with other drugs purchased on the streets. Texas has launched a “One Pill Kills” public education campaign, which should be replicated nationwide.

