

FENTANYL IN YAMHILL COUNTY



SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

Despite reduced numbers of opioid pain prescriptions and decreases in heroin use, local health officials and law enforcement are concerned about an increase in overdoses related to altered pills and substances laced with fentanyl. When talking about fake pills containing fentanyl, Yamhill County Public Health Officer, Dr. Bill Koenig, says, "the risk has now been enhanced."



Counterfeit pills containing fentanyl seized by the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, 2021

"The current fentanyl epidemic is unlike any opioid challenge we have faced," said Sheriff Tim Svenson. "It's important to understand that a fatal dose of fentanyl can be placed into any illicit substance and is routinely being found in phony prescription pills such as counterfeit oxycodone".

Individuals may think they are purchasing Oxycontin or Xanax on social media and have no idea that they are getting deadly fentanyl. Sheriff Svenson goes on to say that "Several deaths have occurred in Yamhill County at the hands of these counterfeit pills. I can't stress enough that you should never take a prescription pain reliever that does not come from your doctor or a licensed pharmacy. The result of taking a pill with an unknown origin can be fatal."



Counterfeit pressed pills containing fentanyl. Source: DEA

Pills, called "Blues", for their common color, or "M30s" for the stamp commonly found on each pill, are a grave concern. The counterfeit tablets are so well-made that even experienced users say they can't tell the difference between a fake pill and a pill manufactured by a pharmaceutical company. Fakes are often meant to appear like the common pharmaceutical-grade painkiller oxycodone. These counterfeit pills are increasingly testing

positive for fentanyl and are commonly disguised as other drugs and medications. The (Drug Enforcement Administration) DEA has found fentanyl in opioids and medications for anxiety and ADHD. Medications like Oxycodone, Percocet, Adderall and Xanax are just some of the common medications that when counterfeited often contain fentanyl. The deception can be deadly if someone believes they are taking a harmless pill.

FENTANYL FACTS

- One in four fake pills tested by DEA labs contained a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl.
- Fake pills are sold online and on apps that are popular with teens, who may believe they are buying something safe for anxiety or depression, or what they believe to be “study drugs”.

WHAT IS FENTANYL?

Fentanyl is prescribed by doctors for pain and is stronger than morphine. Pharmaceutical fentanyl was developed for pain management treatment of cancer patients, applied in a patch on the skin. Fentanyl is increasingly made illegally and distributed as a street drug and mixed – often unknowingly to the user—with other drugs, such as heroin and other opioids, methamphetamines, ecstasy, cocaine, cannabis and benzodiazepines.



Two Milligrams of fentanyl (pictured above) is enough to kill someone. (photo courtesy of DEA)

Fentanyl can make a person stop breathing and counterfeit pills are especially dangerous because the amount of fentanyl varies from pill to pill, even in the same batch. Just two milligrams of fentanyl – the weight of a mosquito—in a pill could mean death. Even those who have a high tolerance for opioids face an increased risk of death.

The DEA says the surge in counterfeit, fentanyl-laced opioid pills started just a few years ago. But by 2020, the federal agency deemed illicit fentanyl primarily responsible for the nation's ongoing opioid crisis.

Most of the illicit supply comes from outside the United States, where clandestine laboratories synthesize fentanyl into counterfeit oxycodone pills – blue, round, stamped with “M” on one side and “30” on the other. They're increasingly referred to on the street as “M30s.”

Strahm said the increase in demand for counterfeit opioid pills correlates with tighter restrictions on the legal prescription of opioids.

The latest provisional drug overdose death counts through May 2020 suggest an acceleration of overdose deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Per a review of 2020 data in Yamhill County, there were a total of 12 fatal overdoses related to illicit drug use; 7 of those overdoses involved fentanyl. This is a drastic increase in fentanyl seen in the toxicology results.



Lethal dose of heroin vs. lethal dose of fentanyl

Already this year in Washington County, the Westside Interagency Narcotics Team has seized more than 17,000 pills, with most suspected as counterfeit "M30" Oxycodone pills. In all of 2020, the team seized fewer than 14,000 pills.

Investigators with Multnomah County Sheriff's Office say they're seeing similar numbers. Last month the Special Investigations Unit seized more than 5,000 oxycodone pills, many of them suspected of containing fentanyl.

Over 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States in the 12 months ending in May 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period, according to recent provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

WHAT'S BEING DONE ABOUT IT: PREVENTION & INTERVENTION EFFORTS

Even experts struggle to tell a fake pill from a real one. The best way to prevent an overdose from counterfeit pills is to avoid any pills from friends, sold on the street, or obtained through websites that don't require a prescription, said Multnomah County's Harm Reduction Program Supervisor Kelsi Junge. Counterfeit pills are not all the same. One counterfeit pill may be harmless, while another from the same batch could be deadly.

People who do choose to use pills outside of a care plan developed with a healthcare provider should take steps to reduce the risk of overdose, Junge said.

Never use when alone in case you or someone you are with begins to overdose.

Local Public Health Officer Dr. Koenig recommends that anyone who uses prescription/non-prescription opioids or knows someone who does should carry multiple doses of the overdose-reversal drug naloxone (name-brand "Narcan").

SYMPTOMS OF OVERDOSE

- Clammy skin
- Dizziness and confusion
- Lips and fingernails unusually colored
- Vomiting or foaming at the mouth
- Limp body
- Slow, weak or no breathing
- Snoring or gurgling
- Difficult to or not able to awaken

WHAT TO DO

- Call 911 - It is important to call for medical care in case it is not an opioid overdose, or it is another medical condition.
- Is the person breathing?
- Administer naloxone if you have it
- Stay with the person until help arrives

Naloxone or NARCAN, a medication that counteracts the effects of opioids, can reverse an overdose. All first responders carry Narcan, but so can anyone else. The Oregon Good Samaritan Law protects both the person who administers naloxone and the person who is overdosing from prosecution.

Anyone who uses prescribed or unprescribed opioids can get naloxone from a pharmacy. Health insurance may cover the cost of Naloxone/Narcan. Kits are also available from Provoking Hope at 971.261.2259 or 971.312.3762



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If you or someone you know needs urgent mental health help, call Yamhill County Mental Health Crisis Line at 1.844.842.8200



To leave an anonymous message, you may call (800) 577-1707 or email crimetip@co.yamhill.or.us

