



Fentanyl in Pills, A Deadly Dose

People who buy pills on the street illegally—like Oxycontin, Xanax, Percocet, Adderall, and others—don't realize that these pills could contain fentanyl, and just a few milligrams of fentanyl can kill. Fentanyl is a deadly synthetic opioid that is being pressed into fake pills or cut into heroin, cocaine, and other street drugs to drive addiction.

There has been a substantial increase in unintended overdose deaths in the U.S. due to fentanyl. That is why it is so important for the public to be educated on fentanyl and the associated risks of using an illegal street drug that might contain the deadly drug. Everyone should know to never take a pill that wasn't prescribed directly to you. Never take a pill from a friend. Never take a pill bought on social media. Just one pill is dangerous, and one pill can kill.

A Flood of Fentanyl

A new report by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) illustrates how fentanyl has quickly flooded America's illegal drug market. Fentanyl seizures by law enforcement increased more than 1,700% in the last six years.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that their laboratory testing has revealed that seven out of ten fake prescription pills contain a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl. The DEA seizes on average more than 20 million fentanyl-faced fake prescription pills quarterly.

Many of the fentanyl-laced pills seized by law enforcement were produced by the Jalisco and Sinaloa Cartels in Mexico. These pills look *identical* to real prescription medications and are now even being manufactured to look like some popular weight-loss drugs. This is why it is important to never trust your own eyes to determine if a pill is legitimate. The only safe medications are those prescribed by

a trusted medical professional and dispensed by a licensed local pharmacist.

The DEA states: "Fentanyl remains the deadliest drug threat facing this country. It is a highly addictive synthetic opioid that is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. Just two milligrams of fentanyl, the small amount that fits on the tip of a pencil, is considered a potentially deadly dose. According to the CDC, 107,622 Americans died of drug poisoning in 2023, with 66 percent of those deaths involving synthetic opioids like fentanyl. The Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco Cartel in Mexico, using chemicals largely sourced from China, are primarily responsible for the vast majority of the fentanyl that is being trafficked in communities across the United States."

Signs of Counterfeit Drugs

While the legal U.S. drug supply is one of the safest in the world due to a "closed" drug distribution system, the growing prevalence of *illegal* (fake or falsified) medicines is alarmingly deadly. Everyone now must be on the lookout for counterfeit pills.

Here are some possible signs of counterfeit drugs:

- Does the drug or packaging look different than what you normally receive?
- Have you experienced a new or unusual side effect after using the drug?
- Did you buy the drug from an online pharmacy?

Ingestion of fentanyl can cause confusion, extreme drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, changes in pupil size, cold and clammy skin, coma, and respiratory failure leading to death.

Consumers should only buy medications from state-licensed pharmacies to ensure they are getting safe, effective, and high-quality drugs that have been approved by the FDA. Visit [BeSafeRx](#) for more information about the potential dangers of buying medicine from online pharmacies.

Protect Youth from Fentanyl

Parents should know that drug traffickers are using social media to advertise drugs and conduct sales. Anyone with a smartphone and a social media account can be found by a drug dealer. This means they are finding and targeting kids who have social media accounts. Therefore, all parents and caregivers need to be educated on current drug threats to be able to have informed talks with their kids.

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

- Encourage open and honest communication.
- Explain what fentanyl is and why it is so dangerous — Stress not to take any pills that were not prescribed to you from a doctor — No pill purchased on social media is safe!
- Make sure they know fentanyl has been found in most illegal drugs.
- Create an “exit plan” to help your child know what to do if they’re pressured to take a pill or use drugs.

The following suicide prevention information, while provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, will also be helpful to those in states other than Georgia. All online resources listed are available to users nationwide.

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, a time when mental health agencies and advocacy groups raise awareness about suicide risk, when we remember the countless lives lost to suicide, acknowledge the millions who have struggled with thoughts of suicide, and honor the individuals, families, and communities whose lives have been forever altered by the loss of a loved one to suicide.

Here are a few truths about suicide in America: Suicide is a leading cause of death in the US (currently 12th), but it is also the most preventable. Suicide deaths occur at a much higher rate than homicides, but in this era of true crime obsession, we hear about them far less. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young adults ages 15 to 25, but it is rarely the main issue discussed when we talk about the dangers youth are facing today. Why? Mostly because of stigma, misinformation, and fear.

But just hearing about the scope of the problem can make this issue seem so daunting and insurmountable that people begin to feel like there is nothing that they can do to stop it. That is why the most important messages we can share during National Suicide Prevention Month are mental health resources like 988, wellness practices like grounding exercises and mindfulness techniques, and messages of hope, recovery, and resiliency.

Yet it is also not enough to solely reach those individuals who are already considering suicide as an option. Our messages must be a call to action to their friends, family members, coworkers, fellow parishioners, neighbors, and community members who may find themselves in a strategic position to help save a life. These messages should embolden everyone to look at those around them and follow their instincts when they see someone suffering and ask, “Are you thinking about suicide?” If they are, let them know that they are not alone and support them in getting the help they need.

Get involved by hosting and or attending gatekeeper trainings like Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). These are effective ways to give people the tools and the knowledge to identify suicide risk and to intervene in an informed and compassionate way when they see those signs in others. 988 is a groundbreaking national resource that everyone should be aware of, but that many Americans have still not heard of. Getting involved with your local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) chapter or joining your county’s suicide prevention coalition are also great ways to make an impact and reduce suicide rates in your community. National agencies like the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) also have state offices that put on *Out of the Darkness* walks in most major population centers that you can freely join. You can find out more about what’s happening around suicide prevention in Georgia by visiting DBHDDs suicide prevention website at preventsuicidega.org.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at: <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact the Suicide Prevention Director, Rachael Holloman, at: rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov.



Supervisor Newsletter

Drug Use and Employee Health

Supervisors should be concerned about their employees' substance use health and do whatever is possible to prevent substance use disorders and addiction in the workplace.

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), in the past year:

- 46.8 million Americans (aged 12 and older) battled a substance use disorder.
- 10.5% of Americans 12 and older had an alcohol use disorder (as we know, alcohol is one of the most consumed substances in the U.S.).
- About 27.2 million Americans 12 or older reported suffering from a drug use disorder.
- Eight million Americans 12 and older struggled with both alcohol and drug use disorders simultaneously.
- 21.5 million American adults suffered from both a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder, or co-occurring disorders.

Employees need to understand the potential for developing alcohol and drug use disorders.

For example, many employees are consuming alcohol at a high risk and are not aware of it. This is why employee education programs are so important.

Avoiding Stigma

Why is there not more of a focus on employee substance use? Too often, the reason is because of the stigma associated with drug and alcohol *abuse*. But the problem is that substance use is currently only addressed *after* it becomes an illness.

We know that employees experience harm and impacts to their health no matter where they are on the spectrum of substance use. Therefore, there needs to be more of a proactive approach to prevention in order to stop the problem before it starts and worsens.

Supervisors should learn how to talk about substance use with employees in ways that are compassionate, without facilitating stigma. According to recent research, 95% of people with a mental health or substance use disorder say that they have been impacted by stigma in the last five years.

Companies need to work on developing a culture of work where employees feel comfortable talking about their substance use concerns. The focus should be on implementing practices as an organization that creates an environment where there is no fear of stigma.

Employee Assistance Programs

Employees should never be put in a position in which they are afraid to access help from the company EAP. The goal should always be to have solutions in place that help prevent workers from progressing downward on the substance use spectrum.

Supervisors can work with the company EAP to create policies for how the organization can best support an employee who needs help with their mental health and substance use. Workers need to understand that they are not alone in dealing with mental illness or substance use issues.

Bottom Line Impact

Why should supervisors be concerned about employee substance use and mental health? Because these are workplace problems that directly impact the bottom line.

The cost of substance abuse to the American economy is currently more than \$532 billion a year.

According to Kaiser Permanente:

- Mentally distressed workers are 3.5 times more likely to have substance use disorders.
- 62% of missed workdays can be attributed to mental health conditions including substance use.
- Employees with untreated mental health conditions and/or substance use disorders use healthcare services three times more than those who do get treatment.
- 50% of full-time employees have left their positions in the past because of mental health reasons.

Taking Action

Supervisors should work to implement a process that encourages self-disclosure or self-identification by employees who are struggling with substance use issues.

All work processes, procedures, and policies should also be reviewed to ensure that employee mental health is included or considered.

These actions will help supervisors to address the problem of substance use and mental illness head-on, and to make sure employees feel supported and valued.