

# FENTANYL



## Information for Parents

Spring 2023



The rise of fentanyl on the illicit drug market has been in the news for a while now. You have likely seen headlines about its potency, lethality, and impact. In fact, many experts in law enforcement consider fentanyl to be the “deadliest drug threat our country has ever faced.” This newsletter will hopefully help you to better understand the current situation, by explaining what fentanyl is and how it impacts the brain and body. You will learn about how fentanyl is being used in fake prescription pills and to lace other drugs. You will also learn why talking to your child now about the dangers of fentanyl is absolutely imperative.

### What is fentanyl? How does it work?

Fentanyl is a synthetic, opioid pain medication that is typically prescribed to treat extreme pain, especially after surgery. Fentanyl is 100x as potent as morphine and it takes very little for it to be deadly. Only two milligrams of fentanyl is considered a potentially lethal dose.

Like morphine and other opioids, fentanyl impacts the way the body and brain communicate. While the pain a person feels is not removed, the pain messages are blocked from the body to the brain. At the same time, opioids produce a powerful release of endorphins or feel-good chemicals. As opioid use continues, a person often must use more of the drug or use a more potent drug to feel the same level of euphoria, and it can make it hard to feel pleasure from anything besides the drug.

It is important to know that fentanyl and other opioids are depressants. Depressants slow down the brain stem. The brain stem controls vital functions such as heart rate and breathing, which explains why opioids can lead to respiratory failure and death. Fentanyl use can also cause confusion, drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, changes in pupil size, cold and clammy skin, and coma.



### How pervasive is fentanyl and why?



Fentanyl is produced both legally and illegally. In the illegal drug market, cartels have found that fentanyl is much cheaper to produce than heroin and it produces a stronger high that quickly hooks their customers.

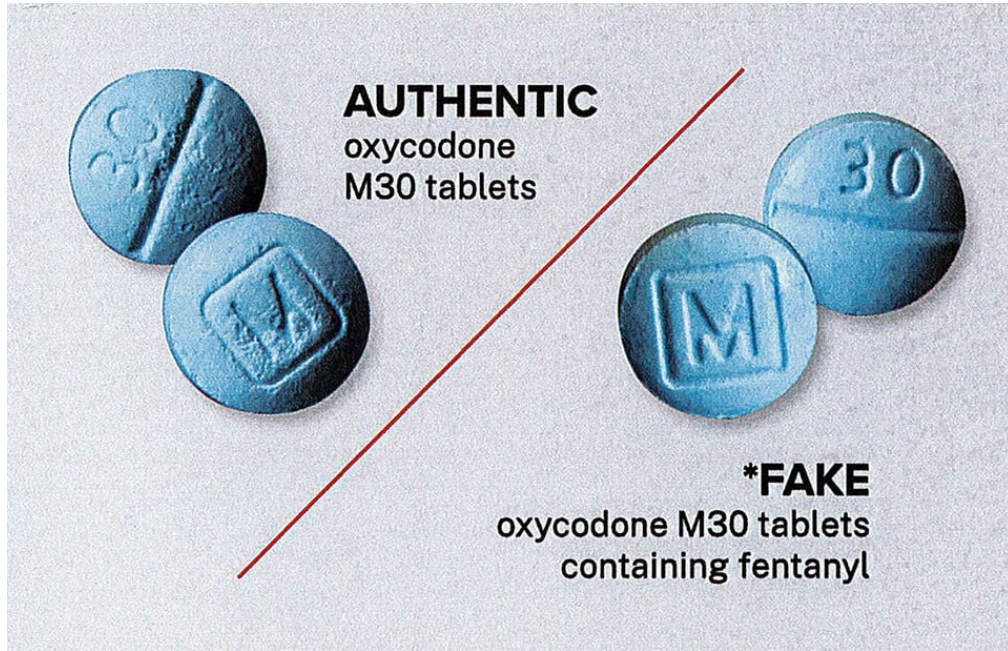
Over the last several years, fentanyl has increasingly contributed to lethal overdoses. From January 2021-January 2022, 67% of overdose deaths involved a synthetic opioid such as fentanyl.

According to Anne Milgram, Administrator for the Drug

Enforcement Administration (DEA), “Drug traffickers are increasingly mixing it (fentanyl) with other types of drugs, in powder and pill form, to drive addiction and attract repeat buyers. Tragically, many overdose victims have no idea they are ingesting deadly fentanyl until it’s too late.” Currently, the DEA finds that of the fake prescription pills that are seized, 6 out of every 10 contain a lethal amount of fentanyl.

## Fentanyl and Youth

Drug dealers are using social media platforms to connect with teens and young adults. The social media app, Snapchat, which is widely popular with young people has received the most scrutiny, but dealers are present on other sites as well. Unsuspecting young people, often believe they are purchasing a prescription drug such as Adderall or a Xanax, unaware that these are fake pills that have been laced with fentanyl. Unknowingly, many fall victim to fentanyl poisoning. The fake prescription pills are made to look exactly like the real thing. There is no way to tell them apart. They are also being produced in rainbow colors, which seem more like candy and appeal to young people.



**Never has it been this dangerous to experiment with a drug. That is why trusted adults must speak to the young people in their lives explicitly about the dangers of taking any medication that is not prescribed to them and that does not come from a licensed pharmacy.**

The DEA has developed the "One Pill Can Kill" campaign with resources for parents. Please visit their website, <https://www.dea.gov/onepill>. There you can learn more about the emoji codes that are being used on social media.

DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

**ONE  
PILL CAN  
KILL**

## EMOJI DRUG CODE | DECODED

### COMMON EMOJI CODES

### FAKE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

#### PERCOCET & OXYCODONE



#### XANAX



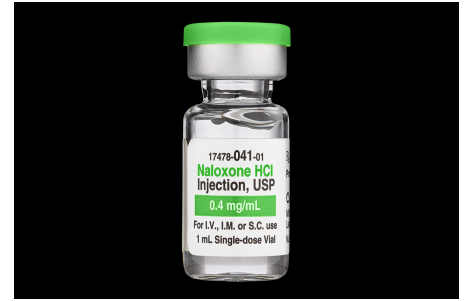
#### ADDERALL



## The Need for Naloxone

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids, including fentanyl. Naloxone is available in two forms, a nasal spray, and an injectable solution.

Naloxone reverses an overdose by blocking the effects of opioids. It can restore normal breathing within 2-3 minutes for someone whose breath has slowed or stopped due to an opioid overdose. With a strong opioid like fentanyl more than one dose of naloxone may be needed.



You do not need medical training to use naloxone. Experts suggest keeping some on hand, especially if there are opioids of any kind in the house. Naloxone will not cause harm so even if you are unsure if someone is suffering from an opioid overdose, it is best to administer it. Once naloxone has been administered, call 911 and stay with the person until emergency help has arrived. Narcan, a brand name for naloxone, was recently approved by the FDA for over-the-counter availability.

### Tips for Trusted Adults:

- 1. Be approachable and initiate conversations.** Talking about it once is not enough. Key messages to get across:
  - o Explain what fentanyl is and why it is so dangerous.
  - o Do not take any pills that are not prescribed to you by a medical professional.
  - o No pill purchased on social media is safe.
  - o Most illicit drugs have been found to contain fentanyl.
- 2. Ask them what they know.** With social media and the Internet at their fingertips, chances are young people may be seeing the “advertisements” for prescription medications from drug dealers on-line. What have they seen or heard from classmates or friends?
- 3. Use news or stories to start conversations.** There is a lot in the news about fentanyl and about the presence of drug dealers on social media. Use these stories to start the conversation.
- 4. Be their way out.** Create a plan to help your child know what to do if they are ever pressured to take a pill or use drugs. Let your child know that they can call you anytime to come get them when in a peer pressure situation. They can use you as an excuse.

### Additional Resources:

<https://candorhealthed.org/parent-information/family-resources/resources-drug-education/opioid-information/>  
<https://candorhealthed.org/drug-education-portal/>  
[https://www.dea.gov/onepill.](https://www.dea.gov/onepill)  
<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/>  
<https://drugfree.org/>

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*Chicago High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas*

