

THE TRUTH ABOUT COUNTERFEIT PILLS



Widely available and easy to purchase, counterfeit pills are making their way into communities at alarming rates, causing increases in substance use disorders, overdoses and, in some cases, death.

FAKE PILLS. REAL HARM.

Mass-produced counterfeit pills, touted as legitimate prescription medications, are not only sold locally but are now also broadly marketed through internet e-commerce sites and social media, appealing to audiences of all ages — including minors. These illegally purchased fake pills may contain no active ingredient(s), the wrong active ingredient(s) or the right ingredient(s) but in an incorrect quantity.

Dangerous, cheap and highly addictive drugs (e.g. methamphetamine, heroin, fentanyl) are frequently added to and disguised as prescription drugs like OxyContin®, Percocet® and Xanax®. Individuals using fake pills have no way of knowing what they may be taking — or the risk they may pose.

Overdoses are the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 to 45 years old.¹

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Counterfeit pills often look nearly identical to their legitimate counterparts, in both design and packaging, making it practically impossible to know the difference outside of a lab test.

A majority of counterfeit pills resemble prescription opioids, such as oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®) and alprazolam (Xanax®), or stimulants, like amphetamines (Adderall®).



Counterfeit pills most commonly resemble oxycodone 30mg (M30) pills, which can vary in color from white to blue. Street names for these pills include "Mexican Blues," "Blues" or "M-Boxes."

Kids and teens are being targeted with fake pills in a variety of shapes and colors.

According to the CDC, overdose deaths linked to synthetic opioids, like fentanyl, tripled in the past two years, yet 73 percent of teens weren't aware that fake prescription pills could be made with fentanyl.

A DANGEROUS DOSE

Whether an individual is a regular substance user or someone experimenting for the first time, taking prescription medications not prescribed to the user by a licensed medical professional and dispensed by a registered pharmacist can be deadly. Counterfeit drugs may contain lethal amounts of fentanyl and methamphetamine.



State health data for 2021 shows fentanyl was present in 83 percent of overdoses involving opioids in Iowa, compared to 31 percent in 2016.²

According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), 2 out of every 5 tested counterfeit pills that have fentanyl as an ingredient contain a potentially lethal dose of about two milligrams — small enough to fit on the tip of a pencil. Fentanyl is approximately 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin. Synthetic opioids, like fentanyl, are the primary reason overdose deaths have increased since 2020, accounting for 80 percent of opioid-related deaths in the U.S.¹