FENTANYL FACTS · FOR EVERYONE

Everything you need to know about fentanyl.

Straight answers to the questions families, schools and communities ask most. Share it. It could save a life.

2 mg
A potentially deadly dose of fentanyl. About what fits on the tip of a pencil.[1]

16%
Fentanyl pills tested by the DEA in 2026 that held a potentially deadly dose.[2]

#1
In 2021, fentanyl was the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18 to 45.[3]

66,000+
Americans lost to overdose in the 12 months ending May 2026. Fentanyl is the leading driver.[4]

THE BASICS

What is fentanyl?
A man-made opioid. Doctors use it for severe pain under strict control. The fentanyl behind today's deaths is made illegally. It is about 50 times stronger than heroin.[5]

What is a fake pill?
A pill made to look like a real prescription, like oxycodone, Percocet, Xanax or Adderall. You can't tell by looking. Many are sold to young people online.[1]

Who is at risk?
Anyone who takes a pill that didn't come from a pharmacy, or uses any street drug. That includes a teen trying one pill for the first time.

Where does it come from?
The DEA says most of it is made by Mexican cartels, using chemicals mostly shipped from China. It is pressed into pills or mixed into other drugs.[6]

Why is it so dangerous?
A tiny amount can kill, and most people who die never knew they took it. It is often mixed with xylazine ("tranq"), which naloxone does not reverse.[6]

How do young people get fake pills?
Often through their phone. Dealers use social media, emoji codes and payment apps, and can deliver within hours.[1]

THE BOTTOM LINE

Never take a pill unless it was prescribed to you and came from a pharmacy.

SPOT IT AND RESPOND

What does an overdose look like?

Tiny "pinpoint" pupils. Slow or stopped breathing. Blue or gray lips and fingertips. Choking or gurgling sounds. A person who won't wake up.[7]

Will I get in trouble for calling 911?

All 50 states and D.C. have Good Samaritan laws that offer some legal protection to people who call for help. Protections vary. Always call.[9]

Is there help for addiction?

Yes. Addiction is a treatable medical condition, and recovery is possible. Medicines like buprenorphine and methadone greatly lower the risk of dying.[7]

What is naloxone (Narcan)?

A nasal spray that can reverse an opioid overdose, including fentanyl. It's sold over the counter and is often free. It won't hurt someone who hasn't taken opioids. Fentanyl may take more than one dose.[8]

Can touching fentanyl make me overdose?

Medical toxicologists say brief skin contact is very unlikely to. If you touch an unknown powder, wash with soap and water, not hand sanitizer.[10]

How can I protect the people I love?

Talk early and often about fake pills. Keep naloxone at home and in the car. Lock up medicines and drop unused ones at a pharmacy or DEA Take Back site.[7]

IF YOU THINK SOMEONE IS OVERDOSING

1. **Call 911**
   Say the person is not breathing or won't wake up.
2. **Give naloxone**
   One spray in a nostril. Give a second dose after 2 to 3 minutes if nothing changes.
3. **Support breathing**
   Give rescue breaths if you are trained.
4. **Turn them on their side**
   This keeps the airway clear.
5. **Stay with them**
   Naloxone can wear off before fentanyl does.

GET HELP

EMERGENCY
911

POISON HELP
1-800-222-1222

SAMHSA HELPLINE
1-800-662-4357

FIND TREATMENT
FindTreatment.gov

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE
Call or text 988

Fentanyl Families Network
For families who have lost a loved one. Scan to join.

About us. United Against Fentanyl is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that interrupts the use of illicit fentanyl through innovative, bold, and effective initiatives. Learn more at unitedagainstfentanyl.org.

SOURCES

1. U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, fake pill public awareness campaign, dea.gov/onepill.
2. U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Operation Engage, "Seattle" fact page, dea.gov/operation-engage/seattle (2025 and 2026 laboratory testing and seizures).
3. Families Against Fentanyl analysis of CDC mortality data, 2020 to 2021 (published 2022).
4. CDC National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Rapid Release, Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts, 12 months ending May 2026 (released Oct. 2026).
5. U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Facts About Fentanyl, dea.gov/resources/facts-about-fentanyl.
6. U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, National Drug Threat Assessment, 2025.
7. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Overdose Prevention and Response Toolkit, 2023; CDC, Stop Overdose.
8. U.S. Food and Drug Administration, approval of Narcan 4 mg naloxone nasal spray for over-the-counter use, Mar. 29, 2023.
9. Harm Reduction Legal Project, 50-state survey of overdose Good Samaritan laws, current as of Dec. 31, 2025.
10. American College of Medical Toxicology and American Academy of Clinical Toxicology, joint position statement on preventing occupational fentanyl exposure, 2017.

For education only. Not medical or legal advice. In an emergency, call 911. Updated November 2026.