

Fighting overdose epidemic, US bans all fentanyl-type drugs

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The US Justice Department on Thursday announced a ban on all fentanyl-like drugs amid skyrocketing rates of overdoses from the synthetic opioids.

Authorities moved to plug legal loopholes in which producers of fentanyl—which can be 50 times more potent than heroin—slightly alter the [chemical makeup](#) to render it a legal substance.

"Anyone who possesses, imports, distributes, or manufactures any illicit fentanyl analogue will be subject to criminal prosecution in the same manner as for fentanyl and other controlled substances," the Justice Department said.

The department says some 20,000 of last year's 64,000 [drug overdose deaths](#) can be blamed on fentanyl, either pure or mixed with other drugs such as heroin or prescription opioids.

With the supply of [prescription opioids](#) on the market cut back in the past two years, fentanyl has become the cheapest alternative for addicts.

It can be easily bought on the underground internet, and much of it is imported into the country through regular shipping channels, including via the mail and package shippers.

US officials say most of the imported fentanyl comes from China, which Beijing denies.

"The action announced today will make it easier for federal prosecutors and agents to prosecute traffickers of all forms of fentanyl-related substances," the Justice Department said.

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