

# 'Alarming' amount of new drugs on dark web, study finds

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Australians have access to mass amounts of potent drugs online, equivalent to "billions of doses" every day, according to a new study from the Australian National University (ANU).

The report found "alarming" amounts of synthetic opioids such as [fentanyl](#) and carfentanil available on the dark web.

Carfentanil is not for human use and was originally designed to sedate elephants.

The researchers say the report lifts the lid on a significant new synthetic [opioid](#) market on the dark web.

"We are on the brink of a new opioid epidemic driven by synthetics like fentanyl and carfentanil that are driving a greater risk of overdose deaths," said lead author Professor Roderic Broadhurst, from the ANU Cybercrime Observatory.

"Accessing these drugs is almost as easy as buying a book on Amazon. Australia is a good market, because Australians pay a premium for drugs.

"There are fewer sellers selling big amounts and many sellers selling small amounts and it is in such small amounts, it makes it easy to move.

"It is like ants moving houses and terrifically profitable."

The researchers found millions of doses for sale online each day, with an average of 15-22 kilos of the potent drugs available on the dark web.

"Fentanyl is a designer synthetic opioid about 100 times more powerful than morphine," said Professor Broadhurst.

"The average dose of fentanyl is 200 micrograms. We found millions of doses of fentanyl available to buy every day.

"Carfentanil is 10,000 times more powerful than morphine and there are alarming amounts of it available online."

"We were shocked by the amount of Carfentanil we found. Billions of doses are available online on any day."

Professor Broadhurst says fentanyl is being used by criminal networks to

lace heroin and create synthetic heroin that is changing the landscape of narcotic sales.

"Fentanyl used to be limited to the anaesthetic world. It is a powerful but short acting knock-out drug, but it has now crept into general use as a recreational opioid," said Professor Broadhurst.

"Some users are also addicted from previous pain relief prescription use.

"Fentanyl dealers could do a Breaking Bad and make it in their own kitchen but carfentanil is so dangerous it is a biohazard."

The ANU researchers collected data from the dark web for 51 days in January and February 2019 analysing six mainstream dark web markets.

More than 123,000 unique drug listings were online with nearly 7,400 opioids listed in six "Main Street" dark web markets.

"The structure of the global trade in narcotics is completely changing," said Professor Broadhurst.

"The bigger picture is the shift from plant based narcotics to factory produced synthetics notably opioids, amphetamine type stimulants and new designer drugs."

According to Professor Broadhurst there are significant challenges for police when it comes to addressing this type of cybercrime.

"The quantities of potent drugs is scaled down. This, combined with the anonymous access offered to both distributors and recreations users, makes it very hard to detect and monitor."

Key findings from the report:

- Data collected daily from six dark web markets between 2 January and 23 February 2019 reveals the amount, types and physical forms of fentanyl available
- Of more than 123,000 unique [drug](#) listings identified, nearly 7,400 were opioids.
- 439 of all drugs listed (0.347%) were fentanyl products
- Between 15 and 22 kilograms of fentanyl was available on any day and the average price per gram varied between A\$30 and A\$301
- Over half the drugs available were listed on "main street" [dark web market](#) Wall Street
- Fentanyl laced products were listed under colloquial names such as Apache, China White, Bear and TNT
- It came in five physical forms tablets, powder, solutions, and sprays. Patches and powder dominate

Provided by Australian National University

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