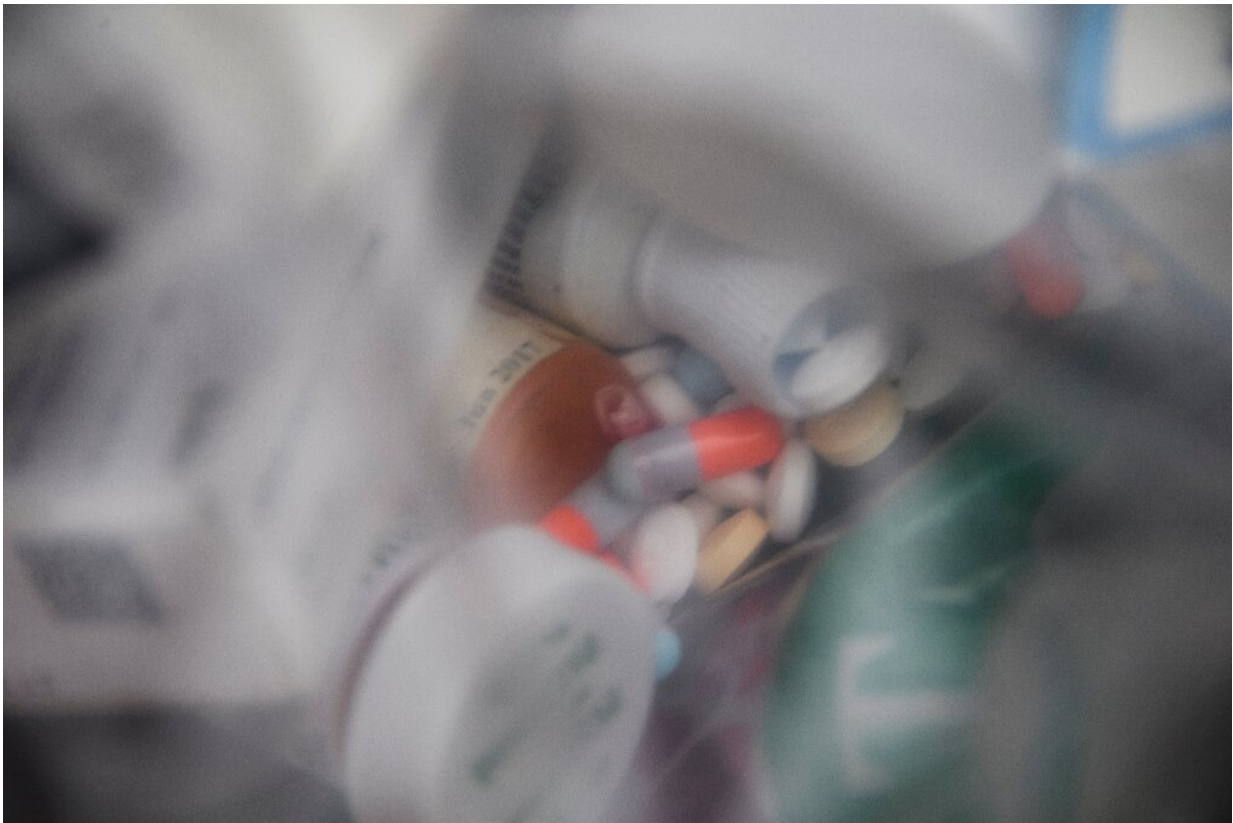


US targets Chinese firms in painkiller crackdown

December 16 2021, by Shaun Tandon



With people who are dealing with addiction increasingly turning to cheaper pills bought online from abroad, President Joe Biden signed an executive order that makes it easier for the United States to target foreign drug traffickers.

The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on Chinese

painkiller makers as it vowed to step up action to curb the addiction epidemic that killed a record 100,000 Americans last year.

With people who are dealing with addiction increasingly turning to cheaper pills bought online from abroad, President Joe Biden signed an executive order that makes it easier for the United States to target foreign drug traffickers.

The actions "will help disrupt the [global supply chain](#) and the financial networks that enable synthetic opioids and precursor chemicals to reach the United States," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

Under the new executive order, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on four Chinese chemical companies and one individual, Chuen Fat Yip, whom it described as "one of the largest, if not the largest, producer of anabolic steroids in the world."

The State Department also put up a reward offer of up to \$5 million for the arrest of the 68-year-old, who is believed to live in Wuhan.

In federal charges filed in 2018, his company was accused of producing some \$280 million of anabolic steroids over five years and of sending ingredients for the painkiller fentanyl through small packages sent around the world.

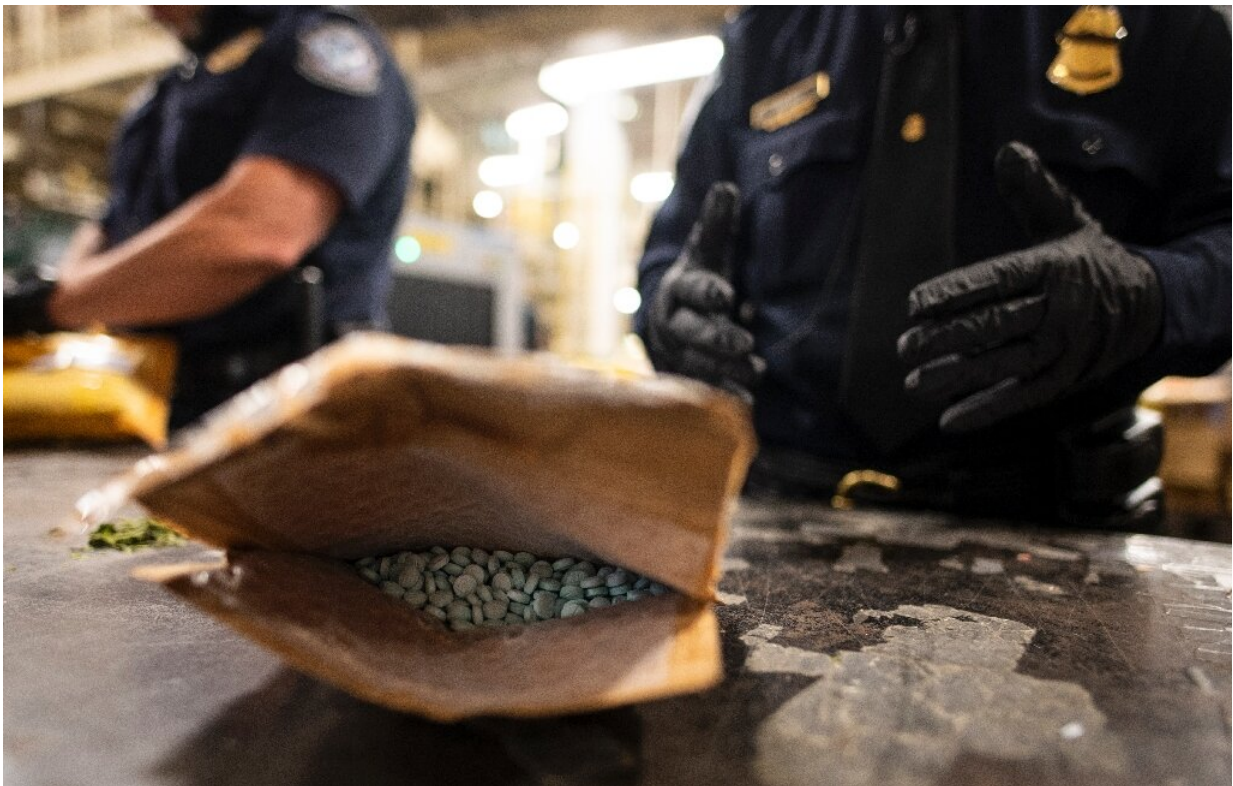
Last month, US authorities seized the equivalent of \$2.3 million in the crypto currency bitcoin traced back to Chuen, prosecutors based in Dallas said.

The Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on two criminal drug groups in Mexico and one in Brazil.

The sanctions will block any assets in the United States that the groups or Chuen may have and criminalize transactions from the United States.

Rise in online trade

More than 100,000 Americans died in the year through April from overdoses of painkillers, an epidemic initially blamed on how [drug companies](#) eagerly promoted their use, and how readily available they became to people in despair.



An officer from US Customs and Border Protection finds Oxycodone pills in a parcel at John F. Kennedy Airport in June 2019 in New York.

Painkiller addiction has spiked more recently due to a proliferation of fake drugs, often smuggled in from overseas, that can be bought online.

A 2020 report by the US Drug Enforcement Agency said that while Mexican drug traffickers were increasingly producing tablets that are smuggled into the United States, the primary source of fentanyl material—some sent to Mexico—originated in China.

The report said that India, known for its giant pharmaceutical industry, was also quickly become a source of illicit painkillers.

"I think it's very simple that a lot of the precursors to synthetic opioids originate in China," a Biden administration official said of Wednesday's actions.

"And it was important for us to send a signal on that front."

Under heavy pressure from the United States, China in April 2019 decreed a ban on fentanyl.

A report last year by the Center for Advanced Defense Studies found that Chinese makers quickly branched out to selling the precursors inside fentanyl, which are not banned and often have legal uses as well.

The Chinese sellers often sell the ingredients openly on the web, helping to secure credibility and customers, it said.

The prosecutors in Texas said that Chuen was even believed to have traveled to the United States in 2015 to attend a trade show and negotiate transactions.

Biden's executive order allows the United States to target foreign [drug](#) makers directly rather than focusing on cartels or other criminal groups,

historically the focus of US efforts.

Biden also established the US Council on Transnational Organized Crime, which will coordinate among departments to combat transnational crime.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: US targets Chinese firms in painkiller crackdown (2021, December 16) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-12-chinese-firms-painkiller-crackdown.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.