

Explosion in US adolescent overdoses, mainly fentanyl

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Drug overdoses among people aged 10 to 18 more than doubled in the United States between 2019 and 2021, according to a study released Thursday by health authorities, who warned in particular of the risks of

counterfeit pills containing fentanyl.

The average monthly rate of overdose among adolescents increased by 109 percent between 2019 and 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

And the number of overdoses involving illegally manufactured [fentanyl](#) increased by 182 percent.

However, illicit drug use among adolescents was down overall during the same period, suggesting that the rise in deaths was likely caused by more potent drugs rather than more frequent usage, the study said.

Fentanyl, an ultra-potent and addictive synthetic opiate, is easy to produce at low cost in the laboratory, and the drug has flooded the American market over recent years.

According to the study, around a quarter of [adolescent](#) overdoses were linked to counterfeit pills, often sold under the guise of Oxycodone, a painkiller, or Alprazolam, an anxiety [drug](#) often known by the brand name Xanax.

The percentage is likely an underestimate, as pills found at the scene of an overdose are not always tested.

"The proliferation of counterfeit pills is particularly concerning for adolescents given marketing aimed toward this population and the availability of such pills via social media," the CDC report said.

"Whether adolescents intended to take legitimate pharmaceutical medications or were aware pills were counterfeit is unclear," it said.

A total of 1,808 adolescent overdoses were reported between July 2019

and December 2021 in 31 American states and Washington DC, the report said.

The median rate of deaths per month was 32.5 between July and December 2019. That shot up to 68 per month over the same period in 2021, an increase of 109 percent.

"Urgent efforts to prevent overdose deaths among adolescents are needed," the CDC warned.

Among the measures needed, the CDC listed a strengthening of prevention campaigns alerting to the dangers of counterfeit pills, but also making [adolescents](#) more aware of the existence of tests to detect the presence of fentanyl.

It also recommended educating young people about the antidote naloxone, which can block the effect of opiates and be administered in the event of an overdose.

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