

Report suggests fake oxycontin pills widespread and potentially deadly

July 26 2024, by Ernie Mundell



The rate at which young Americans are ending up in hospital ICUs after

using fake Oxycontin pills spiked with fentanyl is soaring, especially in the U.S. West, a new report warns.

Medical toxicology data from one unnamed hospital in the western U.S. found the number of cases involving overdoses involving fake "M-30" Oxycontin pills rose from just three in 2017 to 209 during 2022, according to a team from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Most [patients](#) (81%) required [hospital care](#) and more than two-thirds of those patients spent time in the ICU. Two patients died while hospitalized, the report found.

Young men were the most likely victims: Males made up 71% of cases, and patients between the ages of 15 and 34 accounted for more than two-thirds of cases, said a team led by CDC researcher Emily Glidden.

The hospital's experience reflects what's going on nationwide.

"These findings are consistent with a broader trend that has been observed nationally and regionally," the team wrote in a report published July 25 in the CDC journal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

They note that fake M-30 Oxycontin ([oxycodone](#)) pills first emerged on the illicit drug marketplace in the United States in 2014. They're typically laced with potentially deadly [fentanyl](#) and are either swallowed or crushed and inhaled, the researchers explained.

They noted that by 2022, six in every 10 lots of counterfeit pills seized by [law enforcement](#) were found to contain potentially lethal levels of fentanyl.

While many users may believe they are buying and consuming legitimate

oxycodone pills, "evidence that some persons may purposefully use counterfeit pills with illegally made fentanyl exists," Glidden's group noted.

There's data to suggest that people addicted to injected heroin might now be consuming fentanyl-laden counterfeit pills to achieve a needle-free high, the team explained.

Too often, the consequences of doing so can be deadly.

The CDC team point to other data showing that deaths linked to the use of counterfeit pills tripled in the U.S. West between July 2019 and December of 2021, although such cases are rising nationwide.

More than half (57.1%) of those who died were under the age of 35.

The danger to teens is especially troubling: Overdose deaths involving counterfeit pills containing fentanyl "sharply increased across 31 states" between mid-2019 and late 2021, the researchers noted, with counterfeit pills implicated in a quarter of all teen deaths caused by ODs.

In the vast majority of [overdose](#) cases seen at the hospital that was the focus of Glidden's study, other illicit substances were also involved. Besides fentanyl, drugs such as meth (66.2% of cases), benzodiazepines such as Xanax or Valium (17%) or cocaine (5.1%) were also detected in patients' systems.

What can and should be done to reduce deaths and hospitalizations?

According to Glidden's team, "outreach focusing on younger persons misusing prescription pills, improving access to harm reduction

[interventions], and linking patients treated for overdoses in hospitals to substance use treatment might help prevent overdoses involving counterfeit pills."

More information: The [U.S Drug Enforcement Agency](#) has more on the dangers from counterfeit pills.

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