



Community Threat Bulletin

Risk of fentanyl overdose deaths in school-aged youth: Guidance for parents and schools

The Oregon-Idaho High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) is warning Idaho schools and parents about the threat of overdose due to counterfeit pills containing fentanyl. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) 40% of all counterfeit pills in circulation contain fatal amounts of fentanyl. This bulletin contains guidance for schools and parents.

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a very strong opioid. Although fentanyl is made and used pharmaceutically, it is also produced illegally in Mexico and trafficked into the United States, usually as powder and pills. A very small amount can cause someone to overdose and die.

30's" or "Mexies." These fake pills are usually blue in color and stamped to look like real oxycodone pills you would get from a pharmacist. Because it takes a very small amount of fentanyl to cause an overdose, one pill can be deadly.

In Idaho, fentanyl is most commonly seen in blue pills made to look like pharmaceutical oxycodone. People who sell or purchase drugs may call these pills "M-30s," "blues," "dirty

The OR-ID HIDTA seized 1.5 million counterfeit pills in 2021.

This was a 51% increase from 2020 and a 137% increase from 2019.



Figure: Counterfeit oxycodone pills.

Why is fentanyl a threat to youth in Idaho?

Youth may use drugs for different reasons.

- Youth may use drugs to cope with mental health problems and stress. Many are still struggling from the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on their lives in and outside of school.
- Youth may experiment with drugs with their friends or in social settings.
- Youth may desire oxycodone pills for the feelings of euphoria they can cause.

In a 2019 survey, one in five Idaho high school students reported being offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property during the past 30 days.¹

Fake pills are easy to get at school or via social media.

- There are accounts on social media designed to sell pills and other drugs.
- Snapchat is a popular tool for purchasing drugs because messages disappear.

When youth use illegal pills, they may not know:

- that the pills are fake. They may think the pills came from a doctor or pharmacist.
- that counterfeit pills contain fentanyl and other dangerous drugs.
- what fentanyl is, or know that one pill can be deadly.
- how to recognize and respond to an opioid overdose.

In a 2021 national survey, 59% of youth aged 13-24 hadn't heard of fentanyl. Only 37% believed that fentanyl was "extremely dangerous."²

How can schools and parents work together to reduce youth overdose risks?

Youth need to be educated on the dangers of fentanyl, even if they only try one pill one time. Schools and parents should share the following messages with youth:

- Assume all pills offered to you are fake and contain fentanyl. You can't smell or taste fentanyl. You cannot tell if a pill is fake just by looking at it.
- Do not take any pill that you do not directly get from a doctor or pharmacist. Pills purchased online or from social media are not safe.
- Every pill is different - even if one pill seems safe another pill from the same batch may contain fentanyl.
- The amount of fentanyl in one pill can vary widely. Splitting a pill may not be a safe option because all the fentanyl could be in one half of the pill.
- If you or someone around you takes an illegal pill, know how to recognize an opioid overdose. Never use illegal pills when you're alone.
- Provide easy access to naloxone, also known as [Narcan®](#). Narcan® is a drug that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. Naloxone can be administered as an injection or as a nasal spray.

Opioids include heroin, fentanyl, and prescription medications like oxycodone.

Know the signs of an opioid overdose:

- Pinpoint pupils
- Slow, shallow, or no breathing
- Gurgling or snoring
- Difficult to wake or can't wake
- Extreme drowsiness
- Cold, clammy skin
- Grey/blue skin, fingernails, or lips

Call 911 if you think someone is overdosing. You will not get in trouble for calling 911 because of [Idaho's Good Samaritan Law](#).

What should schools do?

- Share this bulletin with parents and caregivers.
- Train school staff to know the signs of an opioid overdose.
- Have Narcan® available in case an overdose occurs on campus.
- Reach out to your [local health district](#) to coordinate a school training, a town hall, or some other educational event for parents and students. Law enforcement can also partner on these events.
- Reach out to the [Idaho Office of Drug Policy](#) for youth messaging campaign materials. If a messaging campaign is not available, schools should advocate for the development of one. Examples of recent campaigns: [Fake and Fatal](#), [Operation Prevention](#), and [Laced and Lethal](#).
- Implement an up-to-date drug education curriculum that includes fentanyl education.

What should parents do?

- Know the signs of an opioid overdose (see above).
- Talk to youth about the dangers of pills, fentanyl and all substance use. Idaho youth are less likely to use drugs if they know their parents disapprove.¹
- Work with your local school district to advocate for up-to-date drug education curriculums that include fentanyl education.
- If you are worried your child or one of their friends may be using illegal pills, store Narcan® in your home with your other emergency or first-aid supplies.

In Idaho, anyone with a valid reason can ask for a prescription for naloxone from a doctor, pharmacist, or other prescriber. The naloxone does not need to be for yourself. Check your insurance for coverage and cost information.

- Get rid of unused or expired medications on National Drug Take Back Day on April 30, 2022. Idaho residents can find more information, including drop off locations, [here](#).

For questions, please contact:

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Sources:

1. [2019 Idaho Healthy Youth Survey](#)
2. [Current Data. Song for Charlie.](#)