



U.S. Department of Justice
Drug Enforcement Administration

Office of the Administrator

Springfield, VA 22152

TO: LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERS

**FROM: ANNE MILGRAM
ADMINISTRATOR
DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION**

SUBJECT: RESPONDING TO NATIONWIDE INCREASES IN FENTANYL-RELATED MASS-OVERDOSE EVENTS

The DEA is seeing a nationwide spike in fentanyl-related mass-overdose events involving three or more overdoses occurring close in time at the same location. In just the past two months, there have been at least 7 confirmed mass overdose events across the United States resulting in 58 overdoses and 29 overdose deaths. Many of the victims of these mass overdose events thought they were ingesting cocaine and had no idea that they were in fact ingesting fentanyl.

If a mass-overdose event occurs in your area of responsibility, please contact your local DEA office right away. DEA special agents and intelligence analysts stand ready to offer all of the resources at our disposal to assist your offices in any way we can.

The following recent mass overdose events occurred throughout the United States:

- On March 10, 2022, 6 individuals overdosed at a rental property in Wilton Manors, Florida after being exposed to a substance that they believed was cocaine, but contained fentanyl.
- On March 4, 2022, 21 individuals overdosed, 3 of whom died, at a homeless shelter in downtown Austin, Texas after ingesting crack-cocaine and methamphetamine laced with fentanyl.
- On March 3, 2022, 3 individuals overdosed and died in a hotel room in Cortez, Colorado after ingesting what that they believed were 30mg oxycodone pills, but which were in fact fake prescription pills containing fentanyl.
- On February 20, 2022, 6 individuals overdosed, 5 of whom died, in the same apartment in Commerce City, Colorado after ingesting a substance that they believed was pure cocaine, but was in fact pure fentanyl.

- On February 6, 2022, 4 individuals overdosed, 2 of whom died, in the same apartment complex in Omaha, Nebraska after ingesting a substance that they believed was cocaine, but contained fentanyl.
- Between February 5-7, 2022, 8 individuals overdosed, 7 of whom died, at an apartment complex in St. Louis, Missouri after ingesting crack-cocaine laced with fentanyl.
- On January 28, 2022, 10 individuals overdosed, 9 of whom died, within the same city block in Washington, D.C. after ingesting crack-cocaine laced with fentanyl.

Tragic events like these are being driven by fentanyl. Fentanyl is highly-addictive, found in all 50 states, and drug traffickers are increasingly mixing it with other types of drugs—in powder and pill form—in an effort to drive addiction and attract repeat buyers. These mass-overdose events typically occur in one of the following recurring scenarios: when drug dealers sell their product as “cocaine,” when it actually contains fentanyl; or when drug dealers sell fake prescription pills designed to appear nearly identical to legitimate prescriptions—such as OxyContin®, Percocet®, or Vicodin®—that are actually fake prescription pills containing fentanyl. This is creating a frightening nationwide trend where many overdose victims are dying after *unknowingly* ingesting fentanyl.

Fentanyl is driving the nationwide overdose epidemic: the CDC estimates that in the 12-month period ending in October 2021, over 105,000 Americans died of drug overdoses and over 66% of those deaths were related to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. Last year, the United States suffered more fentanyl-related deaths than gun-related and auto-related deaths combined.

At DEA, we are working to trace mass-overdose events back to the local drug trafficking organizations and to the international cartels that are responsible for the surging domestic supply of fentanyl. We are utilizing all of the federal government’s resources to hold these organizations accountable for their roles in these tragic events. DEA special agents are trained to respond to mass-overdose events and we stand ready to offer all of the federal resources at our disposal to assist your offices in any way we can. We offer the following guidance and support:

1. **Contact DEA:** If a mass-overdose event occurs in your area of responsibility, please contact your local DEA office right away. When these mass-overdose events occur, all of our Field Divisions stand ready to assist in:
 - Interdicting the substance that is driving the spike in overdoses;
 - Investigating and identifying the dealers and larger drug trafficking organizations responsible for the overdose event;
 - Providing priority access to all of DEA’s resources, including our labs, chemists, and overdose subject matter experts;
 - Assisting with the presentation of the investigation to federal prosecutors; and
 - Warning the public about the lethal drug threat.

2. **DEA Training**: DEA offers trainings on mass-overdose events. Our special agents specialize in identifying the criminal drug networks responsible for these events and are available to support you in any way they can.

3. **Assume Fentanyl**: We recommend that the members of your offices assume that all drugs encountered during enforcement activities now contain fentanyl. Given fentanyl's extreme toxicity and the increases we are seeing in the distribution of polydrug substances containing fentanyl, please take all the precautions you would take when handling fentanyl whenever you interdict any illicit substance.

Thank you for your work on this critically-important issue. DEA stands ready to leverage all of our resources to support your offices in responding to this unprecedented and growing threat.