

Press Release

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: NIH Study Warns of Illicit Fentanyl in Drug Supply**

Law enforcement seizures of illicit fentanyl increased dramatically in number and size between 2017 to 2023 in the U.S., especially in pill form, according to a new study funded by the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The number of individual pills containing fentanyl seized by law enforcement was 2,300 times greater in 2023 compared to 2017, with 115,562,603 pills seized in 2023 vs. 49,657 in 2017. The proportion of fentanyl pill seizures to the total number of fentanyl seizures more than quadrupled, with pills representing 49% of illicit fentanyl seizures in 2023 compared to 10% in 2017. The study also found a significant increase in the number and weight of fentanyl-containing powder seizures during this time.

Although fentanyl seizures were historically less common in the Western U.S., this study found that this region now accounts for most of law enforcement seizures of fentanyl overall, as well as total weight of fentanyl seized. The proportion of fentanyl pill seizures compared to the overall number of fentanyl seizures was also highest in the West, with 77.8% of all law enforcement seizures of fentanyl in the West being in pill form in 2023. These data emphasize the need for continued monitoring of regional shifts in the fentanyl supply, to help inform targeted prevention and public health responses.

NIDA Director Nora D. Volkow, M.D said Fentanyl has continued to infiltrate the drug supply in communities across the United States and it is a very dangerous time to use drugs, even just occasionally," said. "Illicit pills are made to look identical to real prescription pills but can actually contain fentanyl. It is urgently important that people know that any pills given to someone by a friend, purchased on social media, or received from any source other than a pharmacy pills but potentially deadly – even after a single ingestion.

In 2022, over 107,000 people died of a drug overdose, with 75% of those deaths involving an opioid. The overall rise in overdose deaths is largely attributable to the proliferation of illicit fentanyl, a synthetic opioid. Illicit fentanyl is highly potent, cheaply made, and easily transported, making it extremely profitable. Fentanyl is about 50 times more potent than heroin and a lethal dose may be as small as two milligrams.

While some people knowingly consume fentanyl, many people do not know if the drugs they plan to use contain fentanyl. This is especially true of illicit counterfeit pills, which are often made to resemble prescription medications such as oxycodone or benzodiazepines, but really contain fentanyl. Recent studies have reported a dramatic rise in overdose deaths among teens between 2010 to 2021, which remained elevated well into 2022 according to a NIDA analysis of CDC and Census data. This increase in deaths has been largely attributed to widespread availability of illicit fentanyl, the proliferation of counterfeit pills containing fentanyl, and the ease of purchasing pills through social media.

There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illegally made fentanyl (IMF). Both are considered synthetic opioids. Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain, especially after surgery and for advanced-stage cancer. However, most recent cases of fentanyl-related overdose are linked to illegally made fentanyl, which is distributed through illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect. It is often added to other drugs because of its extreme potency, which makes drugs cheaper, more powerful, more addictive, and more dangerous.

IMF is available on the drug market in different forms, including liquid and powder. Powdered fentanyl looks just like many other drugs. It is commonly mixed with drugs like heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine and made into pills that are made to resemble other prescription opioids. Fentanyl-laced drugs are extremely dangerous, and many people may be unaware that their drugs are laced with fentanyl.

In its liquid form, IMF can be found in nasal sprays, eye drops, and dropped onto paper or small candies.

For additional facts about fentanyl, visit [One Pill Can Kill](#).

SAFE, Inc. is the only alcohol and substance abuse prevention, intervention and education agency in the City of Glen Cove. Its Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," to educate and update the community regarding prescription and illicit drug use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](http://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about prescription drug use and the Opioid Epidemic at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).