

## Fentanyl: Youth Prevention

According to officials with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat facing our nation. Fentanyl is a highly addictive synthetic opioid 50 times more potent than heroin, and up to 100 times more potent than morphine. Fentanyl is not only very strong but it is relatively cheap to produce. Drug traffickers are increasingly mixing it with other types of drugs in powder or pill form, increasing its presence in illicit street drugs. The DEA lab testing has found that 4 out of every 10 pills with fentanyl contain a potentially lethal dose.

In August, the DEA put out a warning to inform the public about colorful pills called “rainbow fentanyl”. Rainbow fentanyl comes in the form of pills, powders, or blocks that look similar to candy or sidewalk chalk. There is concern that this form of fentanyl may appeal to young people or fool them into thinking it is less harmful. Experts note that illicit fentanyl has been hiding in what appears to be other products for a long time and all illicit fentanyl is dangerous, no matter its appearance. In addition to the emerging multi-colored fentanyl, fake prescription pills that contain fentanyl are frequently made to look like Xanax, Hydrocodone, Vicodin or Adderall. Thanks to social media and other online channels, they are easy to buy. A young person buying illicit drugs may think they know what they’re getting, but there is a risk of it containing fentanyl. According to DEA Administrator Anne Milgram, “If you take any drug sold on the street or through the internet, regardless of its medicinal markings or festive appearance, you risk your life”. As such, every color, shape, and size of fentanyl should be considered dangerous.



So how do we prevent fentanyl from getting into the hands of our kids? Steve Bell with the Drug Enforcement Administration Omaha Division says while they are committed to getting out to schools and talking to kids, parents and caregivers play a key role in having conversations with their youth about fentanyl. As with any type of substance use prevention education, it is a conversation that has to be ongoing and happen more than once. Below are some points to consider when talking to kids and teens about fentanyl.

- It is never too early to talk to kids about drug use, especially the dangers of Fentanyl. Using age-appropriate language, start with a conversation about making healthy decisions as a means to ease into the heavy conversation of fentanyl.

- Listen first: ask your youth non-judgmental questions. Is fentanyl something that you have heard about in the news or at school? What have you heard?
- Explain the facts: explain what fentanyl is and why it is so dangerous. Stress that fentanyl in any form can be deadly.
- Stress not to take any pills that were not prescribed to them by their doctor.
- Send a message to youth that all drugs are potentially dangerous and many of them can contain fentanyl. There is no way to recognize if the drugs someone is buying on the street are contaminated with fentanyl and even small amounts of fentanyl can lead to overdose.
- Make sure your child knows that the danger of fentanyl is not limited to drugs bought from a stranger on the street or online. Dispel the myth that drugs bought from ‘trusted sources’, including friends or known dealers, are safe. The person selling or sharing the drugs may not even know that what they are distributing contains fentanyl.

Below are some additional resources to increase awareness of the dangers of fentanyl and engage in conversations with youth.

The DEA “One Pill Can Kill” Initiative offers some great resources for parents and educators to learn more about Fentanyl.

What Every Parent and Caregiver Needs to Know About Fake Pills

[https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/DEA-OPCK\\_Parent%20flyer\\_V6.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/DEA-OPCK_Parent%20flyer_V6.pdf)

Emoji Drug Code: Decoded- A quick reference guide to give parents, caregivers and educators a better sense of how emojis are being used in conjunction with illegal drugs

<https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/Emoji%20Decoded.pdf>

Buying Drugs Online: What You Should Know and How to Protect Your Kids

<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/family/buying-drugs-online-%E2%80%93-what-you-should-know-how-protect-your-kids>

Natural High Fentanyl Toolkit- a resource for parents and educators to help protect kids from the dangers of fentanyl.

<https://www.naturalhigh.org/fentanyl/>

References: <https://facingfentanylnow.org/>; Get Smart About Drugs; Nationwide Children’s; Natural High; Partnership to End Addiction; United States Drug Enforcement Administration