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What You Need to Know to Keep Teens & Young Adults Safe from Counterfeit Prescription Drugs

By **StoryStudio** on October 4, 2021 6:41 PM

According to the Connecticut Department of Public Health, there were 1,378⁰ overdose deaths in 2020; a 14.3% increase compared to 2019. As of the second week of August 2021, there have been 878 confirmed overdose deaths. About 84% of these deaths involve fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine. Fentanyl is being added to counterfeit prescription pills, which are easy to obtain. Depending on what's inside, one pill can be deadly.



On September 27, 2021, The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) issued a public safety warning to raise awareness about a surge of counterfeit pills entering the United States. They stated that more than 9.5 million counterfeit pills were seized so far this year, which is more than the last two years combined. The pills they are seeing contain fentanyl and methamphetamine and can be deadly. According to the DEA's press release, two out of every five pills with fentanyl contain lethal doses. It's not a risk anyone should take.

These pills have been found in every state. In fact, two days after this public alert was released, more than 5,000 counterfeit Xanax pills, which contained fentanyl, were seized in Orange, Conn. during a traffic stop.

Teens & Young Adults Are at Risk

In the United States, nearly 15% of young adults, 18 to 25, reported prescription drug misuse last year. As of 2019, 10.1% of Connecticut high school students reported ever taking a prescription drug without a prescription; rates were highest among 12th-graders. Misusing prescription drugs increases the risk of coming across a counterfeit pill.



Jake Beddoe, 2018 serving in the Peace Corps.

There isn't one "type" of young person who is at risk. There is often an underlying reason for misusing medications. Anyone can encounter a counterfeit pill if they are not obtained

from a pharmacy. Not all young people are misusing prescription drugs to get high. However, some will self-medicate with prescriptions like Xanax to cope with anxiety or to get sleep. Others will turn to stimulants, like Adderall, to help study for a test or to lose weight.



Wally Beddoe (far left) and Niki Beddoe (far right) with their children, from left, Jake, Amy, Carly and Kirk in 2018.

TV therapist Laura Berman lost her 16-year-old son after he purchased a fentanyl-laced Xanax on Snapchat. Meanwhile, here in Connecticut, a Trumbull family tragically lost their 25-year-old son, Jake Beddoe, to a counterfeit Xanax. Jake took what he believed to be a Xanax from an acquaintance to get a good night's sleep; he had been stressed from the pandemic.

“We knew that there had been reports of deaths from people taking heroin that was laced with fentanyl, but we had never heard of it happening with

Xanax,” his father Wally said. “Had we heard about it, maybe we could have had that conversation.”

It Only Takes ONE Pill!



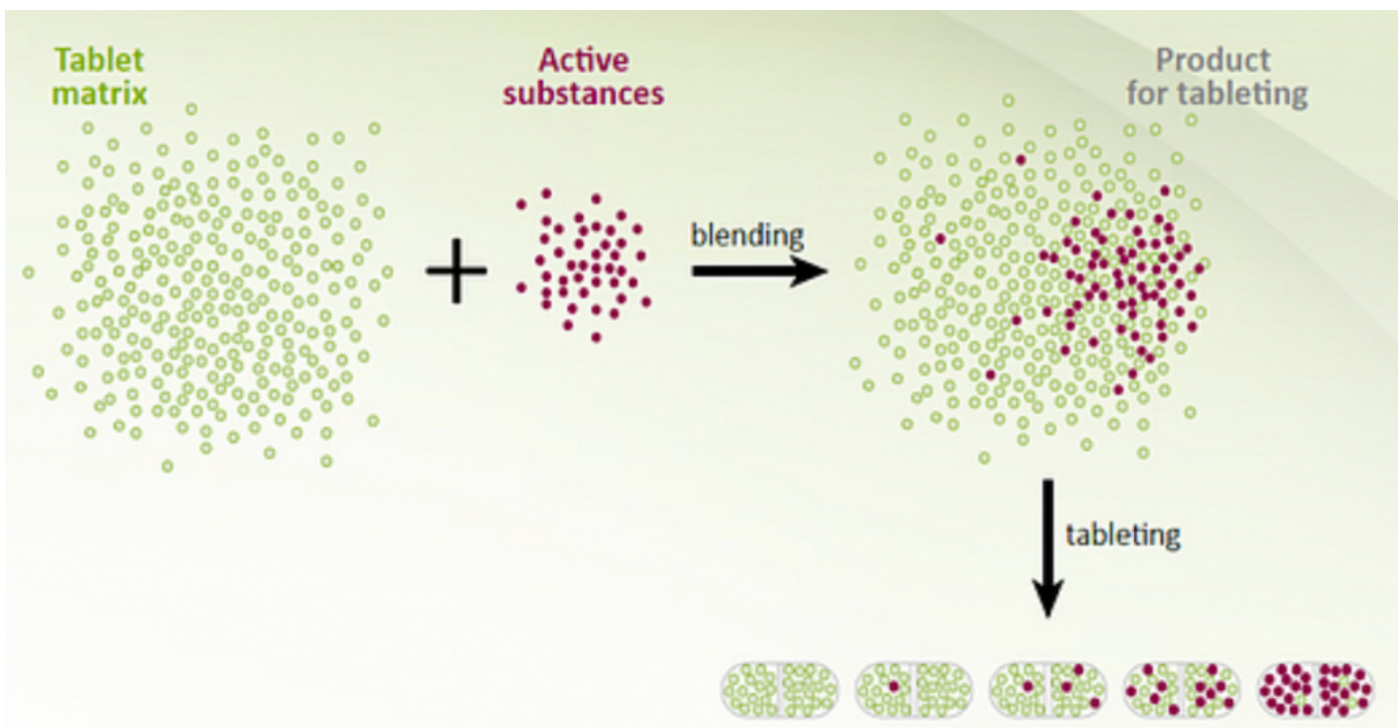
Lethal dose of fentanyl Authentic / OxyContin 30mg (left) Fake (right)

Many teens and young adults believe prescription drugs are a safer alternative to street drugs, however they can be equally as dangerous, especially if they are counterfeit. Counterfeit prescription pills are produced to look almost identical to the real thing. Often, you can't tell the difference without lab tests. These pills contain a number of harmful substances, such as fentanyl, methamphetamine, cocaine and Xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer. Depending on the type and quantity of substance, one pill can be deadly.



Images from Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)

Real prescription drugs are manufactured in facilities where precise amounts of a medication are measured and added to a pill capsule to ensure proper dosing. When counterfeit drugs are produced, there is no quality control or proper dosing. The illustration below shows how substances, like fentanyl, are added to a counterfeit pill, but they are not distributed equally among all of the pills. Therefore, when a person acquires one of these, they could come across one pill that is pure fentanyl (or other harmful substance) or one that contains little to no harmful additive. It's a gamble and one that has life-threatening consequences.



The red dots indicate substances that are added that can be harmful. Image from Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)

The Bottom Line

According to The Partnership to End Addiction, 49% of teens report getting prescription drugs from a friend. Young people have a false sense of security when they know the person giving them the pill, however nobody knows where that friend got that pill from. The only safe prescription drug is one that is prescribed for YOU and is picked up from a retail pharmacy.

YouThinkYouKnowCT.org – A New Resource to Educate Caregivers, Teens & Young Adults About Counterfeit Prescription Drugs

As Jake Beddoe's dad said, if they had known about counterfeit prescription pills, they could have had a conversation with their son. That is the reason a new website [YouThinkYouKnowCT.org](https://www.youthinkyouknowct.org), was developed by the [Connecticut Prevention Network](#) and other community partners; to raise awareness of counterfeit drugs and prevent deaths.

The site educates parents, teens and young adults about the dangers of counterfeit drugs and provides a variety of resources to facilitate conversations and help young people cope with stress, mental health issues and substance use disorders. On the site you can find:

- [Where teens and young adults get prescription drugs](#)
- [Why they misuse prescription drugs](#)
- [Commonly misused medications](#)
- [Dangers of prescription drugs on social media](#)
- [Mental health information](#)
- [Local treatment and support resources](#)
- [Resources for parents, teens/young adults and educators](#)

Talk with teens and young adults in your life about the dangers associated with counterfeit drugs.



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