



July 21, 2021

Contact: Danny Chun  
630-276-5558  
[dchun@team-iha.org](mailto:dchun@team-iha.org)

## **Beware of Fake Prescription Pills This Summer**

*Illinois Poison Center warns of counterfeit drugs containing fentanyl*

Musical festivals across Illinois, including the biggest shows of Lollapalooza starting July 29 and Riot Fest starting Sept. 17, raise concerns of concert-goers using opioids and benzodiazepines that were not prescribed by a doctor. The Illinois Poison Center (IPC) has a warning for anyone who may purchase pills this way: Chances are, the drugs are counterfeit and you may be ingesting fentanyl.

One in four (26%) counterfeit prescription pills contains a potentially lethal dose of the synthetic opioid, according to lab analysis conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration. Since fentanyl is cheap and easy to produce, illicit drug manufacturers often mix it into counterfeit oxycodone (brand names: Percocet® and OxyContin®), alprazolam (brand name: Xanax®) and Adderall®—substances popular with young adults and teenagers.

Anyone who purchases illicit pills or powders online or through friends for recreational use is at risk for a deadly outcome.

“Some people think it’s no big deal to experiment just once for a special occasion,” says IPC Medical Director Michael Wahl, M.D. “But your first time could be your last time. Just two milligrams of fentanyl is enough to kill you, and it’s even more lethal in combination with other substances, such as alcohol.”

Recent preliminary statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed a 27% increase in drug overdose deaths in Illinois between December 2019 and December 2020, on track with the 30% increase nationwide. The vast majority of deaths nationwide involved opioids and synthetic opioids.

According to the CDC, increases in fentanyl-involved overdose deaths are driving increases in synthetic opioid-involved deaths, with fentanyl more likely coming from illicit pills.

When Nicolas, a college student from California, purchased pills for a concert in 2019, he didn't know they contained fentanyl. The 19-year-old suffered a fatal overdose that haunts his family to this day.

"It was a horrific experience that reverberated throughout our family," says Scott Maney, Nicolas' uncle and who previously lived in Chicago for over a decade. "My nephew died, but it kind of took the life of his parents, too. They're never going to be the same. I don't think people realize how that trauma changes people forever."

Maney said Nicolas dreamed of playing professional baseball. He was a dedicated athlete who didn't party much. Reflecting on Nicolas' death, Maney hopes sharing his nephew's story will cause others to reconsider using what they think are prescription drugs for recreational use.

"These pills often look very similar to legitimate prescription medication," says IPC Assistant Vice President Carol DesLauriers, Pharm.D. "You think you're having fun, but you're gambling with your life."

Here are IPC's safety recommendations:

- Do not take prescription drugs not provided by your physician, pharmacist or other healthcare provider.
- Make sure that naloxone is available for people who may ingest or snort prescription drugs from non-medical sources. Naloxone is the reversal agent for opioid overdose and can work for individuals who have overdosed on fentanyl.
- Call 911 when there is an overdose: Rapid care is essential to the care and recovery of someone who has overdosed on fentanyl. The Emergency Medical Services Access Law or the Illinois' "Good Samaritan Law" allows individuals to seek emergency medical help for an overdose without risking criminal liability for possession.

###

The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.