

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Opioid Awareness Summit

The overdose crisis in the United States has reached a devastating new height. One hundred thousand people died last year from drug overdoses, with almost two-thirds of those caused by fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is 50-100 times stronger than morphine. Over the last few years, our country has literally been flooded with fentanyl, which is sold both in powder form and mixed in fake prescription pills. Last year, DEA seized 15,000 pounds of fentanyl, enough to supply 440 million lethal doses. That's enough fentanyl to kill every American.

The fake pills containing fentanyl often look the same as prescription pills, but they're not made in a legitimate drug company's manufacturing lab with controls and oversight. Pressing pills containing fentanyl is inexact. While a fake pill on average contains 1.8 milligrams of fentanyl, laboratory analysis has found that the amount of fentanyl in any one pill can range from as low as .02 milligrams to as high as 5.1 milligrams. About 2 milligrams of fentanyl is a potentially lethal dose, though what is lethal to one individual might be higher or lower. Laboratory analysis has shown that today, 4 out of every 10 fake pills containing fentanyl contain a potentially lethal dose. People who buy and use these fake pills or who use fentanyl in powder form are literally risking their lives.

Young people are particularly susceptible to fall victim to this crisis. A nationwide survey last year found that large numbers of teens reported feeling high levels of stress while also reporting a lack of comfort with seeking help with mental health issues from parents, school officials, or medical professionals. The survey also found that teens reported coping with stress as the top reason that people might misuse prescription medication. Of great concern is that in the survey, 73% of teens weren't aware of fentanyl being illicitly used in counterfeit pills that look like prescription medication. Only 27% of the teens surveyed rated fentanyl as being extremely dangerous. And 35% of teens didn't know enough about fentanyl to even rate its danger level. Clearly, we have work to do to raise awareness among our youth about the prevalence and dangers of fentanyl.

Fentanyl, in both pill and powder form, is readily available to teens from sellers on social media. Recently, law enforcement officials have been seeing colorful powder fentanyl that looks like sidewalk chalk and brightly colored fentanyl pills of many colors resembling candy, like Skittles. Testing hasn't shown any difference in potency between different colored fentanyl pills. Instead, it appears that the colored pills are being manufactured and distributed specifically to appeal to younger buyers.

The President's National Drug Strategy focuses on awareness, prevention, treatment, and enforcement, all of which are critical components of the comprehensive strategy needed to combat this crisis. My Office works closely with the DEA, FBI, HSI, Central Valley HIDTA, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and task forces on the enforcement

component to combat large-scale drug trafficking in and through our district's 34 counties. Together we investigate, disrupt, and dismantle the criminal networks that are bringing drugs into our district and either distributing them here or transporting them across the U.S.

We also actively participate in efforts to raise awareness about the problem. Earlier this month, my Office and several partners convened a summit of more than 325 educators, school nurses, counselors, mental health clinicians, public health professionals, and others with an interest in student health at Sacramento State University for the Opioid Awareness Summit for Educators and Public Health Professionals. The summit focused on four specific goals: (1) building awareness of the scope and state of the national opioid epidemic and its impact on young adults in our region; (2) destigmatizing opioid misuse to provide for more effective treatment interventions; (3) encouraging beneficial conversations with students if approached about drug misuse; and (4) building awareness of the warning signs that a student or child is misusing opioids. Summit participants heard from medical, public health, and law enforcement professionals about enforcement efforts, the science of addiction, treatment options, ready-for-use resources for educators, and best practices for implementing an opioid awareness program in schools.

I am grateful to the partners who teamed up with my Office in sponsoring the summit: the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society, Sacramento State University, Sacramento County, The Well at Sac State, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. We brought together hundreds of people from different schools and varied organizations who are working hard to address the opioid crisis, underscoring our ongoing commitment to keeping our community safe by preventing drug misuse and overdose deaths.

If you would like to communicate with our office, please contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

Phillip A. Talbert
United States Attorney