



# Fentanyl & Counterfeit Pill Facts for Older Adults

## What is fentanyl and how does it work in the body?

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid, similar to morphine but 50 to 100 times more potent. In its prescription form it is prescribed for pain, but fentanyl is also made illegally and distributed as a street drug. Illegal fentanyl is sold as a powder or made into pills that look like real prescription such as pain relievers like oxycodone and anti-anxiety medication like Xanax®.

Fentanyl works by binding to the body's opioid receptors, which are found in areas of the brain that control pain and emotions. Its dangerous side effects include drowsiness, nausea, confusion, sedation, tolerance, addiction, respiratory depression and arrest, unconsciousness, coma, and death.

## Why is fentanyl a problem in Arizona?

Fentanyl is the most common substance found in opioid overdose deaths in Arizona. Adults 45-64 are the second largest age group for overdoses.

Illegal fentanyl is being mixed with other drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine. This is especially dangerous because people are often unaware that fentanyl has been added. The high potency of fentanyl greatly increases risk of overdose, especially in a person who is unaware that a powder or pill contains it.

Naloxone is a medicine that can be given to a person to reverse a fentanyl overdose. Multiple naloxone doses might be necessary because of fentanyl's potency.

## What Can You Do?

**BeSafeRx** | The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) works to protect consumers against counterfeit drugs. Older adults should only purchase medications through reputable, licensed pharmacies.

If you or someone you know is thinking about buying prescription medicine online, FDA's BeSafeRx website helps consumers learn about how to safely buy prescription medicines online.

**Treatment Options** | Treatment works and there is hope. Medication along with behavioral therapies

have been shown to be effective in treating those with an addiction to fentanyl and other opioids.

If you're concerned about someone's opioid or fentanyl use call the **Arizona Opioid Assistance Referral line at 1-888-688-4222** for information about treatment and counseling options.



This publication was made possible by grant number H79TI083320 from SAMHSA. The views, opinions and content of this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of SAMHSA or HHS.