

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department

Health Officer
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HEALTH ADVISORY: Opioid Overdoses from Fake Pills

DATE: September 13, 2019

TO: Schools, after school programs, PTAs, organizations serving youth and young adults

FROM: Sara H. Cody, MD
Health Officer and Public Health Director

You may have recently received a “public health warning” issued by the County District Attorney’s office regarding fake pills containing the powerful and deadly fentanyl. We are writing to provide additional information, guidance and context. Law enforcement agencies across the county have recently seized a large quantity of fake fentanyl-containing pills; how widely these pills are circulating and who may still have them is unknown. The original communication is attached.

Why is this important?

Fentanyl is a very powerful opioid drug— 80-100 times more powerful than morphine—and exposure to even small amounts can cause overdose and death. The County Medical Examiner has reported multiple opioid deaths since early August, including those of a 15 and 16 year old. Several of these deaths have been linked to these fake pills containing the chemical fentanyl, made to look like a 30 mg oxycodone prescription pill (Percocet®). People who took these pills thinking they were taking oxycodone were unaware that they were taking lethal doses of fentanyl. Experimenting with these fake pills can lead to death even the first time.

What are fake pills?

Many opioid pills are now made by counterfeiting organizations. These pills are not prescribed, stolen, or resold by or from verified pharmaceutical companies, and there is no connection between their appearance and their ingredients. They are **fake** pills made to look like real prescription medications. We urge that you do not take a pill that you did not obtain directly from a pharmacy. Do not take a pill that your friend gives you. Do not buy pills from others. Doing so could have deadly consequences.

What is being done?

The District Attorney and multiple law enforcement agencies across the country discovered that this fentanyl-containing fake pill may be in wide circulation around the county and state and have seized large quantities from multiple locations across the county. The Public Health Department has alerted healthcare providers. Because two of the deaths occurred in teenagers, we want to ensure that educators and others who work with adolescents and young adults are aware of this fake drug and know what to look out for. The District Attorney is working with the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department to create a rapid response team and communication efforts to inform the public of the threat posed by these fake pills.

What actions should I take?

Know the signs and symptoms that might indicate an opioid overdose and call 911 if you think someone may have overdosed. Signs and symptoms may include nodding off, falling asleep in class, droopy eyes, pinpoint pupils, appearing “zoned out,” barely being able to stay awake, constipation, etc. A person who has these symptoms from stress or sleep deprivation will be able to wake up, a person who has overdosed will not. There is a drug called Narcan that can temporarily block the effects of opioids; if administered quickly, this drug can be lifesaving.

Remember: Do not take a pill that you did not obtain directly from a pharmacy. Do not borrow medications from your friends. Do not buy medications from your friends. FAKE pills look like real pills, but they can be deadly.

Please share this health advisory widely.

Where can I get more information?

For general information on the opioid epidemic, see: www.cdc.gov/opioids/

For more information on fake pills: www.safemedicines.org/policymakers-media/fentanyl-pills-ravaging-american-communities



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September 10, 2019

PUBLIC HEALTH WARNING

**MAJOR UPTICK IN FATAL FENTANYL OVERDOSES AND SEIZURES OF
COUNTERFEIT 30-MG OXYCODONE PILLS CONTAINING FENTANYL**

Since June 2019, Law Enforcement Agencies in Santa Clara County have seized a large number of counterfeit 30-milligram Percocet pills that contain fentanyl—not oxycodone hydrochloride—as their sole active ingredient. The seizures have occurred all across the county, by different law enforcement agencies, and from different subjects. The tablets visually appear to be the pharmaceutically manufactured version—they are circular in shape, light blue to light green in color, and have an “M” inside a square stamped on one side and a “30” stamped on the other side. Numerous fatal overdoses have been tied to these tablets, with a strong uptick in fatal overdoses in August 2019.

This office still continues to see the presence of fentanyl in counterfeit Xanax “bars” and other pills, in heroin and, increasingly, in powder cocaine.

Brian Buckelew

Brian Buckelew
Supervising Deputy District Attorney,
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