



Department of Justice

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U.S. ATTORNEY RECOGNIZES OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

Warns of Increasing Dangers of Fentanyl

MADISON, WIS. – U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, Timothy M. O'Shea, joins the U.S. Department of Justice, in recognizing Overdose Awareness Day, August 31, 2024.

While 2023 statistics are not yet available, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services reports that 1,828 persons died of a drug overdose in Wisconsin during 2022.¹ That is more than double the number in 2015. In addition, during 2022, there were 15,162 opioid related hospital encounters in Wisconsin.² In Wisconsin, synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl, were identified in 91% of all opioid overdose deaths and in 73% of all overdose deaths.³

The attached table summarizes recent finished fentanyl prosecutions in U.S. District Court in the Western District of Wisconsin. These cases illustrate the crucial, difficult work done by the U.S. Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners.

"The fentanyl epidemic is devastating Wisconsin families and communities," U.S. Attorney O'Shea said. "My office is committed to holding accountable those who traffic in this dangerous drug. We cannot, however, solve this epidemic through prosecutions alone. It is also critical that we continue our educational and outreach efforts with our law enforcement partners and with the community."

"Drug trafficking is anything but a victimless crime. If a fentanyl poisoning hasn't personally affected your family or community, it soon will." O'Shea continued, "That means we all share responsibility to fight the opioid crisis – a responsibility in awareness and prevention."

¹ <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aoda/drug-overdose-deaths.htm>

² <https://wish.wisconsin.gov/results/>

³ <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids/ph-advisory.htm>

Key Points From the Wisconsin Department of Health Services⁴

- Fentanyl and similar synthetic opioids are more potent than other opioids and are driving the increase in overdose deaths.
- People who use multiple substances are at an increased risk for overdose.
- Fentanyl is found in all types of drugs including stimulants (cocaine and methamphetamine) and opioids. It is pressed into pills and mixed into other drugs. A person may think they are using one substance, but they are instead using a substance mixed with fentanyl. It is estimated that as many as 40 percent of counterfeit pills contain enough fentanyl to be lethal.
- Fentanyl is hard to detect. You can't see it, taste it, or smell it. A tiny amount – as little as two grains of salt – is enough to kill someone.
- Fentanyl test strips are legal in Wisconsin and available for purchase. Fentanyl test strips are also distributed free at some pharmacies, service providers, and treatment centers.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services' [Dose of Reality](#) initiative contains resources and information for drug users, parents, loved ones, educators, health care providers, and community members. People across Wisconsin are encouraged to learn more about the risks of fentanyl and how it is contributing to overdose deaths.

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⁴ <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids/ph-advisory.htm>