


# The Deadly Counterfeit Drug Trade Thrives in Minnesota

**In 2015, a company in Minnesota was indicted for selling almost \$400 million in prescription drugs from illegal, unlicensed sources to wholesalers and pharmacies in 40 states.**

The country has seen an upsurge in counterfeit prescription pills masquerading as painkillers and Xanax. These pills are disguised as real medications but made with deadly fentanyl or its even deadlier variants, and **even a fraction of a single pill can mean death in less than 30 minutes** of ingesting it.

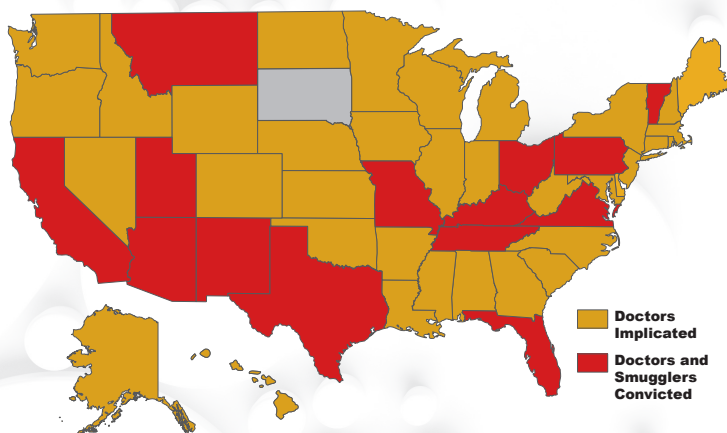
**Fentanyl is a serious threat to Minnesotans.** In April 2016, fentanyl claimed the life of celebrated performer Prince at his home in Chanhassen. Other Minnesotans have also died. Sarah Doppler of Golden Valley and a teenage couple from Chisago County were all charged for selling deadly counterfeit pills containing fentanyl to other Minnesotans.

## 21 Minnesota Doctors Linked to Fake Drug Rings

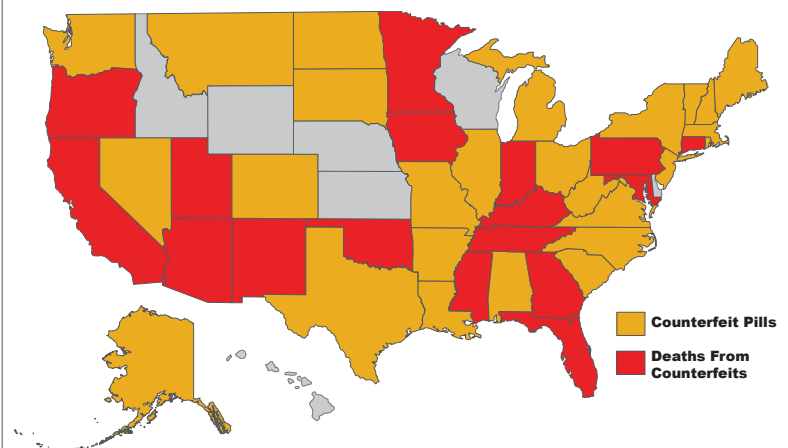
Counterfeit cancer drugs have touched Minnesota as well. 21 different medical practices in Minnesota have been implicated in various black market supply chains associated with counterfeit cancer treatments and other therapies. Families who have lost relatives to cancer will never know if their loved ones were given real medication or fake, and if they died from a lack of treatment. 

**Opening the U.S.'s closed drug supply chain puts Minnesota lives at risk of serious injury or death.**

**Fake Cancer Drug Crisis**



**Fentanyl-Laced Counterfeits & Related Deaths**



# Counterfeit and Black Market Drug Investigations in Minnesota (2009–2018)

**Based on reported investigations.**

**Note that each investigation could have affected hundreds of Minnesota residents.**

## Counterfeit Pills Containing Fentanyl

- January 2018:** A Grand Forks man received 65 months in jail for his role in selling counterfeit oxycodone made with fentanyl in northwest Minnesota and North Dakota.<sup>1</sup>
- December 2017:** Sarah Doppler of Golden Valley was charged with third-degree murder for selling counterfeit pills to a man who died after taking them. Tests showed the pills contained fentanyl and U-47700.<sup>2</sup>
- May 2017:** The indictment of Aaron Shamo from Utah shows that his fentanyl drug ring shipped counterfeit pills into Minnesota.<sup>3</sup>
- February 2017:** A teenage couple from Chisago County were charged in the death of an 18-year-old caused by a counterfeit oxycodone made with fentanyl.<sup>4</sup>
- October 2016:** Officials warned that the increase in counterfeit pills made with fentanyl appearing in Twin Cities mirrored nationwide trends.<sup>5</sup>
- August 2016:** Local officials warned of the dangers of counterfeit pills made with fentanyl after results of the testing of pills found at Prince's home were released to the public.<sup>6</sup>
- April 2016:** Prince Rogers Nelson was found dead in an elevator at Paisley Park. Tests showed that hydrocodone pills seized from his home after his death contained fentanyl. Prince weighed only 112 pounds at the time of his death and his autopsy showed such a high level of fentanyl that it would have killed anyone.<sup>7</sup>
- April 2016:** Authorities warned Minnesotans that fentanyl had arrived in the state. Police had begun investigating after a series of deaths the previous month.<sup>8</sup>

## Black Market and Counterfeit Cancer Drugs

- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, 7 in Minnesota, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.<sup>9</sup>

## Misbranded and Counterfeit Botox

- March 2016:** The FDA warned 11 doctors and clinics in Minnesota and more than 1,200 nationwide to stop buying from Canadian distributor TC Medical, which sold 22 different kinds of non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Botox.<sup>10</sup>

## Other Drugs

- May 2015:** Minnesota Independent Cooperative Inc. (MIC) was indicted for selling almost \$400 million in prescription drugs from illegal, unlicensed sources to wholesalers and pharmacies in 40 states. The indictment alleged that MIC employees created phony invoices and purchase orders to hide the drugs' origins before selling them.<sup>11</sup>
- March 2015:** The Ramsey County sheriff's office seized counterfeit drugs for sale by vendors at the Hmongtown Marketplace in St. Paul. Seven vendors at the same market were charged in 2013 with selling counterfeit drugs and syringes.<sup>12</sup>
- October 2009:** Two Twin Cities men were indicted for allegedly shipping more than 15,000 doses of counterfeit drugs to customers.<sup>13</sup>

1. April Baumgarten, "Grand Forks man gets 65 months for dealing fentanyl pills," *Grand Forks Herald*, January 11, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2DL4rs1>.

2. "Golden Valley Woman Charged with Murder in Overdose Death," *KSTP-TV*, December 27, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2EVIje2>.

3. Superseding Indictment, U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Central Division, Case No. 2:16-cr-00631-DAK, <http://bit.ly/2mGXekE>.

4. Paul Walsh, "Teen couple charged in Chisago County with murder in overdose death of 18-year-old," *Star Tribune*, February 21, 2017, <http://strib.mn/2DuTAP>.

5. "Counterfeit pills containing Fentanyl on rise in Twin Cities," *Fox9.com*, October 25, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2DMsl6y>.

6. Camille Williams, "Disturbing trend: Counterfeit fentanyl," *Kare11.com*, August 22, 2016, <http://kare11.tv/2mNEGPM>.

7. Stephen Montemayor, "Pills seized from Paisley Park contained illicit fentanyl, same drug that killed Prince," *Star Tribune*, August 21, 2016, <http://strib.mn/2DgAgYl>.

8. Stephen Montemayor, "Officials sound the alarm over deadly synthetic fentanyl in Minnesota," *Star Tribune*, April 4, 2016, <http://strib.mn/2DvfNmt>.

9. "Historical Information: FDA Issues Letters to Doctors Who May Have Purchased Counterfeit or Unapproved Prescription Drugs, 2012–2014," U.S. Food and Drug Administration, last updated June 12, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.

10. "FDA Issues Letters to Doctors Who May Have Purchased Counterfeit or Unapproved Prescription Drugs," U.S. Food and Drug Administration, last updated August 17, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2DqFh4c>.

11. "Three California Men and Minnesota Corporation Indicted in Nationwide Prescription Drug Diversion Scheme," U.S. Department of Justice, May 7, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2BdmUKK>.

12. Jaime Delage, "Pills allegedly seized again from St. Paul Hmong market busted in '13," *Twin Cities Pioneer Press*, April 4, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2rkt8ji>.

13. "2 indicted for selling counterfeit drugs," *MPR News*, October 7, 2009, <http://bit.ly/2DlOQuo>.