

# The Deadly Counterfeit Drug Trade Thrives in Utah

**5 Salt Lake City locals allegedly killed at least 28 people with fake drugs made with imported fentanyl.**

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.

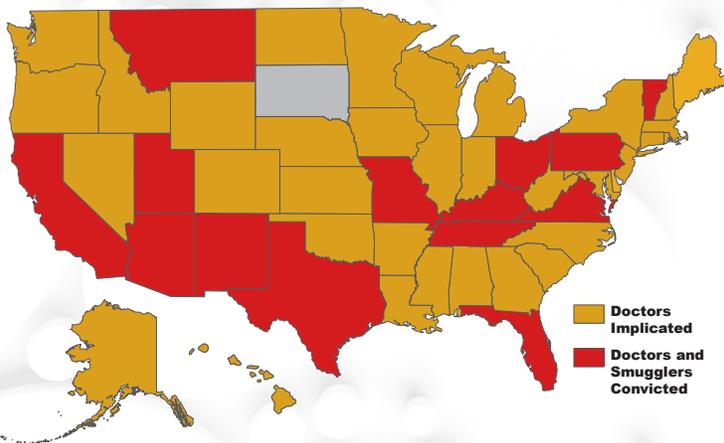
Salt Lake City locals Aaron Michael Shamo and five co-conspirators are allegedly responsible for the deaths of 28, as part of his national business selling counterfeit pills. When Shamo was arrested for selling counterfeit Xanax and fentanyl-laced pills disguised as oxycodone to 24 other states, **federal agents discovered 95,000 counterfeit pills, a pill press and \$1.2 million of cash.** But they're not the only contributor to the **78% increase in fentanyl-related deaths between 2015 and 2016.** Both before and after their arrests, police officers in **Salt Lake, Morgan and Davis Counties** discovered counterfeit pills and sadly, poisoned victims in Morgan and Davis Counties.

## 38 Utah Doctors Implicated in Fake Drug Rings

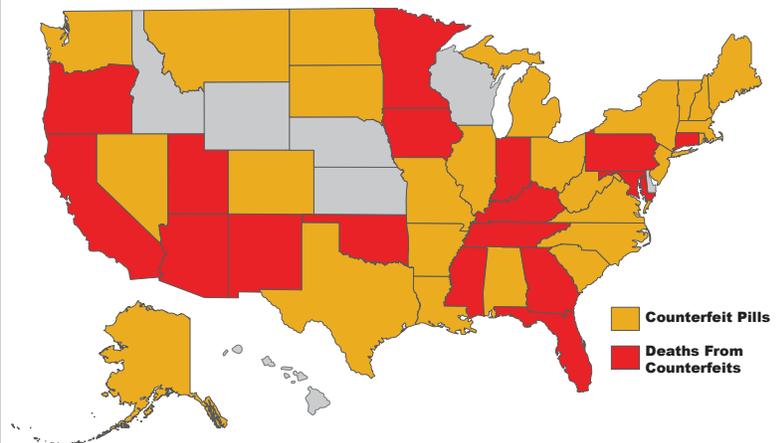
Counterfeit cancer drugs have touched Utah as well. 38 different medical practices in Utah have been implicated in various black market supply chains associated with counterfeit cancer treatments and other therapies. Families who have lost relatives to cancer will never know if their loved ones were given real medication or fake, and if they died from a lack of treatment.

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

**Fake Cancer Drug Crisis**



**Fentanyl-Laced Counterfeits & Related Deaths**



# Counterfeit and Black Market Drug Investigations in Utah (2010–2018)

**Based on reported investigations.**

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

## Counterfeit Pills Containing Fentanyl

- February 2018:** DEA agents arrested four people and searched multiple properties in culmination to a year-long investigation into a counterfeit fentanyl pill mill centered in South Jordan.<sup>1</sup>
- October 2017:** The Utah Department of Health reports that fentanyl-related deaths increased by 78 percent between 2015 and 2016.<sup>2</sup>
- March 2017:** A 17-year-old in Morgan County was revived by EMS and sheriff deputies after he overdosed on half of what he thought was an Adderall pill. He allegedly purchased the pill from 19-year-old Parker Lewis Pentz, who allegedly ordered the counterfeits on the internet.<sup>3</sup>
- November 2016:** Federal agents raided two homes in Salt Lake County and found synthetic opioid components, cash, a pill press, and 95,000 fentanyl-laced oxycodone and counterfeit Xanax pills. A May 2017 superseding indictment alleges that Aaron Michael Shamo and five co-conspirators, who were charged with possession of fentanyl with intent to distribute, shipped counterfeit pills to 24 states.<sup>4</sup> In November 2017, prosecutors announced that they were investigating 28 overdose deaths that may be linked to the Utah-based drug operation.<sup>5</sup> The case is still in progress.
- June 2016:** Layton police officers reported one overdose death as a result of counterfeit Roxicodone pills circulating in Davis County.<sup>6</sup>
- June 2016:** Nathaniel Craigen Jetter was arrested in Sandy, Utah after police found a pill press and other counterfeiting equipment in his hotel room. Jetter, who subsequently pleaded guilty, told police that he was making fentanyl-laced oxycodone pills.<sup>7</sup>

## Black Market and Counterfeit Cancer Drugs

- April 2015:** The FDA warned two Utah medical practices and more than 270 nationwide to stop buying drugs from Gallant Pharmaceuticals, which sold more than 39 non-FDA approved medications.<sup>8</sup>
- April 2015:** Dr. Ali Ben-Jacob pleaded guilty to buying non-FDA approved oncology drugs from a CanadaDrugs.com subsidiary and using them on his patients without their knowledge.<sup>9</sup> In 2012 and 2013, the FDA warned 10 Utah doctors offices and more than 500 across the country to stop buying from CanadaDrugs.com subsidiaries that had sold American doctors counterfeit Avastin.<sup>10</sup>
- July 2013:** Michael Lawrence O'Donnell of Pleasant Grove pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a year in prison for selling American healthcare professionals imported, non-FDA approved prescription drugs, including Botox, Zometa, Gemzar, and Aranesp.<sup>11</sup>
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, seven in Utah, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.<sup>12</sup>

## Other Drugs

- March 2016:** The FDA warned 16 Utah doctors 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>13</sup>
- May 2010:** James A. Brinton, of Provo, and Orem resident Noah Sifuentes pleaded guilty to charges related to selling approximately 8 million phentermine pills over the internet to individuals who lacked valid prescription for the controlled substance. Their products, which also included Ritalin, Xanax, and Valium, were smuggled into the country from Mexico.<sup>14</sup>

## Footnotes

1. Pat Reavy, "Feds arrest 4 in Utah-based pill pressing operation," *Deseret News*, February 2, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2B9477b>.
2. "Utah Health Status Update: Fentanyl Abuse in Utah and Risks to First Responders," *Utah Department of Health*, October 2017, <http://bit.ly/2Bes7Ci>.
3. Pat Reavy, "Morgan Deputies Looking At Fentanyl In Overdose Case, Warrant States," *KSL*, April 24, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2EVh82C>.
4. Ben Guarino, "DEA Raids Colossal Fentanyl Operation. Could Produce Thousands Of Pills Per Hour," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2016, <http://wapo.st/2mTPIZY>; "Drug Trafficking Organization Faces Indictment For Involvement In Manufacturing Fake Prescriptions Drugs With Fentanyl," U.S. Department of Justice, May 31, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2DiNvbf>. Superseding Indictment, U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Central Division, Case 2:16-cr-00631-DAK, <http://bit.ly/2mNteUl>.
5. "Prosecutors Say 28 Deaths Probed In Salt Lake City Opioid-drug Ring Case," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 20, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2DN6hJ6>.
6. "Counterfeit Prescription Pills Circulating Streets Of Davis County, Police Say," *Fox13*, June 14, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2DMFzQK>.
7. Complaint, USA v. Jetter, U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Central Division, Case 2:16-cr-00324-DB, <http://bit.ly/2ERnH6E>; Judgment In A Criminal Case, U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Central Division, Case 2:16-cr-00324-DB, <http://bit.ly/2mOtaU6>.
8. "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>.
9. "Cache Valley Cancer Treatment And Research Clinic Pleads Guilty To Misdemeanor Information Involving Receipt And Delivery Of Misbranded Drugs," U.S. Department of Justice, April 7, 2015, <http://bit.ly/2Do8yxn>.
10. "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>.
11. "July 31, 2013, Pleasant Grove Man Sentenced To Prison After Pleading Guilty to Unlicensed Wholesale Distribution of Prescription Drugs," United States Food and Drug Administration, <http://bit.ly/2DgtHp6>.
12. "Historical Information: FDA Issues Letters to Doctors Who May Have Purchased...", <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.
13. "FDA Issues Letters to Doctors Who May Have Purchased...", <http://bit.ly/2DqFh4c>.
14. "Defendants Plead Guilty to Conspiracy to Distribute Phentermine, Money Laundering in Internet Pharmacy Case Brinton and Sifuentes Admit Selling About Eight Million Phentermine Pills to Customers Without Valid Prescriptions," Federal Bureau of Investigation, May 18, 2010, <http://bit.ly/2DqIPom>.