

# The Deadly Counterfeit Drug Trade Thrives in Virginia

**Rockingham County, August 2017: Police seize nearly a million fatal doses of fentanyl on I-81**



**Virginia Beach, October 2017: 3 police officers treated for fentanyl exposure**

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 Virginians. In December 2017, police seized almost 2 kilograms of fentanyl—enough to kill nearly a million people—during a highway stop in Rockingham County. **According to the Department of Health, fatal fentanyl overdoses increased by 177% from 2015 to 2016, and those numbers were projected to rise in 2017.** Drug traffickers put fentanyl or one of its analogues into the fake pills they make using pill presses and sell them to unsuspecting people on the street.

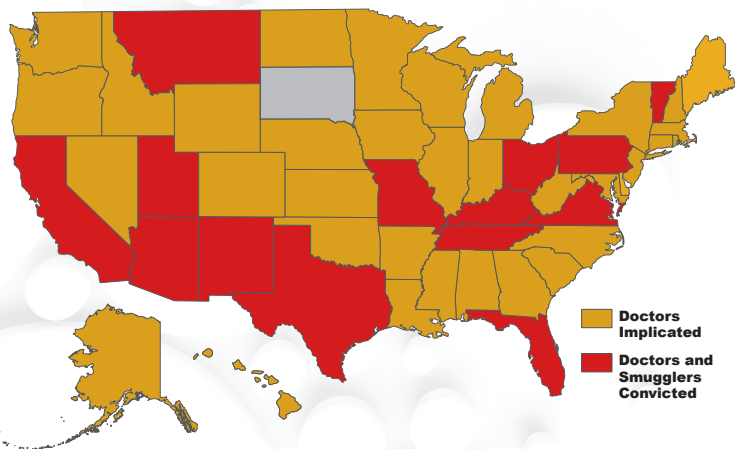
## 45 Virginia Doctors Linked to Fake Drug Rings

Counterfeit cancer drugs have touched Virginia as well. 45 different medical practices in Virginia 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.

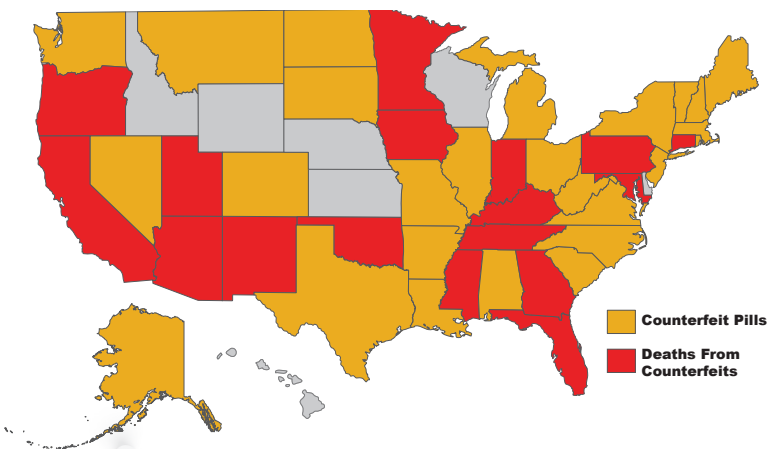
From 2009 to 2013, northern Virginia-based Gallant Pharmaceuticals sold American doctors more than \$12.4 million in non FDA-approved medications shipped under unsanitary conditions from unreliable sources in countries such as India, Switzerland, and Turkey. The Justice Department convicted 12 individuals of charges related to the case.

## Opening the U.S.'s closed drug supply chain puts Virginians at risk of serious injury or death.

**Fake Cancer Drug Crisis**



**Fentanyl-Laced Counterfeits & Related Deaths**



# Counterfeit and Black Market Drug Investigations in Virginia (2011–2018)

**Based on reported investigations.**

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

## **Fentanyl and Counterfeit Pills Containing Fentanyl**

- January 2018:** The Chief Medical Examiner's office reported that fatal fentanyl overdoses increased by 177% from 2015 to 2016, and were projected to rise again in 2017.<sup>1</sup> A Virginia State Police special agent reported at a discussion panel that Virginians had died after taking fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills.<sup>2</sup>
- October 2017:** Three Virginia Beach police officers were treated for fentanyl exposure after they became ill during an overdose call.<sup>3</sup> An officer in Stafford County was treated with naloxone at a local emergency room after a similar experience in August 2017.<sup>4</sup>
- August 2017:** Police in Rockingham County seized nearly two kilograms of fentanyl during a traffic stop on I-81.<sup>5</sup>
- November 2016:** Aaron Michael Shamo's indictment alleges that the Utah-based drug trafficker, who was found with 95,000 counterfeit Xanax and fentanyl-laced oxycodone pills on November 22 and allegedly sold his products in 24 states, shipped 362 deadly counterfeit oxycodone pills to Virginia.<sup>6</sup>

## **Black Market and Counterfeit Cancer Drugs**

- April 2015:** The FDA warned 271 medical practices, five in Virginia, to stop buying medicine from unlicensed drug distributor Gallant Pharmaceuticals.<sup>7</sup> Gallant, a northern Virginia-based company that claimed it was Canadian, sold 39 non-FDA-approved medications shipped in unsanitary conditions from unreliable sources in countries such as India, Switzerland, and Turkey. The federal government convicted and sentenced 12 individuals—executives, sales representatives, administrative staff and others, including a physician in McLean who received the illegal medicines and treated his own patients with them—in connection with the case.<sup>8</sup>
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, 10 in Virginia, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.<sup>9</sup>
- 2012–2013:** The FDA warned more than 500 medical practices across the country—five in Virginia—to stop buying from CanadaDrugs.com subsidiaries that had sold American doctors counterfeit Avastin.<sup>10</sup>

## **Other Drugs:**

- March 2016:** The FDA warned 23 Virginia 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>11</sup>
- December 2011:** Fairfax County, Virginia police seized thousands of doses of counterfeit prescription medication from stores when residents were hospitalized after taking them. The drugs, which included painkillers, birth control pills, antibiotics and other drugs allegedly smuggled into the country from Central America.<sup>12</sup>

## Footnotes

1. "Fatal Drug Overdose Quarterly Report, Third Quarter 2017," Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Virginia Department of Health, January 2018, <http://bit.ly/2nuKWgj>.
2. Amy Friedenberger, "Med Beat: Fatal Opioid Overdoses Double in Roanoke Valley," *The Roanoke Times*, January 25, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2BJi5ZY>.
3. Jane Harper. "Virginia Beach Police Fell Ill While Answering an Overdose Call. Was it From Fentanyl Exposure?," *The Virginian-Pilot*, January 6, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2ny13ZJ>.
4. Keith Epps. "Deputy Exposed to Opiates While Arresting Drug Suspects in North Stafford, Police Say," *The Roanoke Times*, August 3, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2DSPyY2>.
5. "Va. Woman Charged in Record Fentanyl Seizure," *The Daily Progress*, December 1, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2GBomI7>.
6. Superseding Indictment, U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Central Division, Case No. 2:16-cr-00631-DAK, <http://bit.ly/2mGXekE>.
7. "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>.
8. Indictment, Case 1:13-cr-00130-CMH, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, filed March 27, 2013, <http://bit.ly/2Gq1xtE>; "Illegal Drug Company Gallant Pharma And Co-Founder Sentenced," U.S. Department of Justice, May 9, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2Emz4Va>; "Owner Of McLean MedSpa Sentenced For Illegally Importing Non-FDA-Approved Drugs And Using On Patients," U.S. Department of Justice, July 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2FpIbni>.
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. "Historical Information: FDA Issues Letters to Doctors..." <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.
11. "FDA Issues Letters to Doctors..." <http://bit.ly/2DqFh4c>.
12. Natalie Lopez and Julie Carey, "Several Virginia Stores Raided in Counterfeit Prescriptions Investigation," *4 Washington*, December 2, 2011, <http://bit.ly/2FzTqJA>.