

# The Deadly Counterfeit Drug Trade Thrives in West Virginia



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.

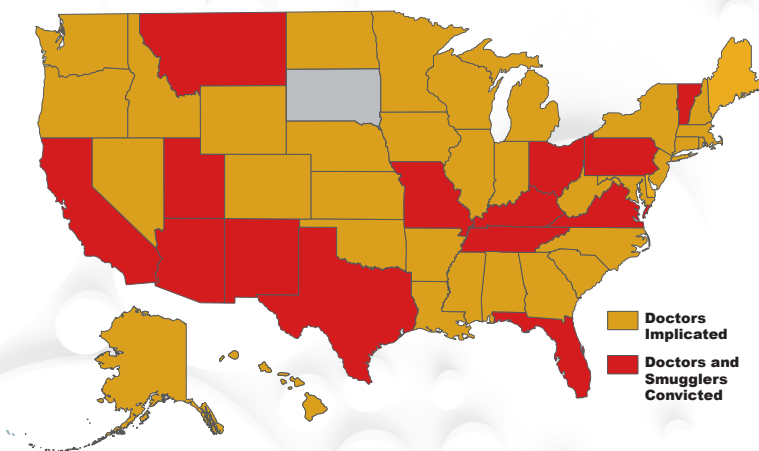
Fentanyl is a serious threat to West Virginians. In November 2017, the Charleston Police Department reported finding **counterfeit oxycodone pills** made from pure fentanyl. **Deaths related to fentanyl increased in the state by 24% between 2015 and 2016.** Drug traffickers put fentanyl or one of its analogues into the fake pills they make using pill presses and sell them to unsuspecting people on the street.

## 18 West Virginia Doctors Linked to Fake Drug Rings

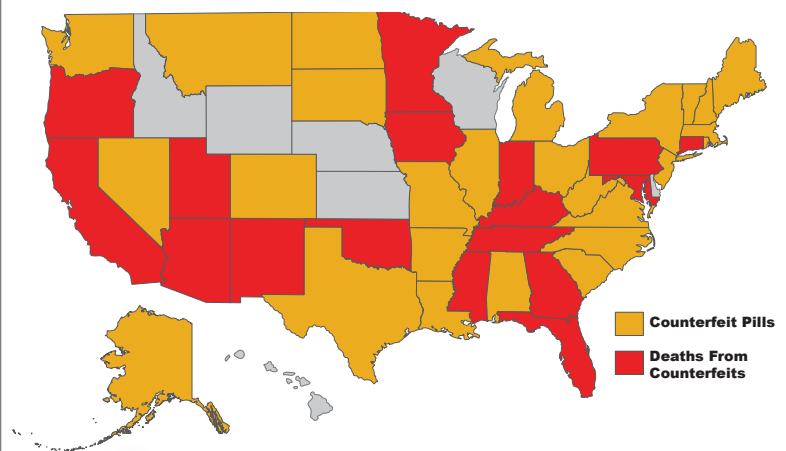
Counterfeit cancer drugs have touched West Virginia as well. 18 different medical practices in West Virginia have been implicated in various black market supply chains associated with counterfeit cancer treatments and other therapies. Families who have lost relatives to cancer will never know if their loved ones were given real medication or fake, and if they died from a lack of treatment.

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

**Fake Cancer Drug Crisis**



**Fentanyl-Laced Counterfeits & Related Deaths**



# Counterfeit and Black Market Drug Investigations in West Virginia (2012–2017)

**Based on reported investigations.**

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

## Fentanyl and Counterfeit Pills Made with Fentanyl

- November 2017:** The Charleston Police Department reported finding counterfeit oxycodone pills made from pure fentanyl. The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources' preliminary statistics showed that fentanyl killed more West Virginians than any other drug in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Fentanyl-related deaths have been on the rise, climbing from 58 to 324 between 2014 and 2016.<sup>2</sup>
- July 2017:** Two police officers in Huntington were hospitalized for suspected fentanyl exposure after processing heroin they had seized for evidence.<sup>3</sup>
- August 2016:** 27 people overdosed and one person died over a six-hour period in Huntington, after taking what authorities believed was fentanyl-laced heroin.<sup>4</sup>
- June 2016:** West Virginia Poison Center warned that it had been notified of three cases of opioid overdose where patients insisted they had taken Xanax.<sup>5</sup>

## Black Market and Counterfeit Cancer Drugs

- April 2015:** The FDA warned 271 medical practices, two in West Virginia, to stop buying medicine from unlicensed drug distributor Gallant Pharmaceuticals.<sup>6</sup> Gallant, a northern Virginia-based company that claimed it was Canadian, sold 39 non FDA-approved medications shipped in unreliable 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>7</sup>
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, four in West Virginia, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.<sup>8</sup>
- 2012–2013:** The FDA warned more than 500 medical practices across the country—five in West Virginia—to stop buying from CanadaDrugs.com subsidiaries that had sold American doctors counterfeit Avastin.<sup>9</sup>

## Other Drugs:

- March 2016:** The FDA warned five West 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>10</sup>
- October 2015:** Federal agents raided a home in St. Albans and found dozens of controlled substances, more than 60 guns, paraphernalia associated with cocaine production, and pill presses allegedly used to make counterfeit Xanax.<sup>11</sup>

## Footnotes

1. Erin Beck, "Fentanyl Main Driver of Overdose Deaths," *Charleston Gazette Mail*, November 19, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2DLDBmS>.
2. Eric Eyre, "WV Drug OD Deaths Soared Above 840 in 2016," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, March 22, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2GtfzuB>.
3. "Four Arrested After 'Blue Heroin' Injures HPD Officers," *Herald-Dispatch, The* (Huntington, WV), July 22, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2FrgYjW>.
4. "One Death Connected to Monday's 27 ODs," *Herald-Dispatch, The* (Huntington, WV), August 19, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2DLNv3L>.
5. Lydia Nuzum, "Fake Fentanyl-Laced 'Xanax' Suspected in W.Va.," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, June 21, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2EkGk3y>.
6. "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>.
7. Indictment, USA vs Gallant Pharmaceutical, Inc, et, al., Case 1:13-cr-00130-CMH, US 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," US 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," US Department of Justice, July 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2FpIbni>.
8. "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>.
9. "Historical Information: FDA Issues Letters to Doctors...", <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.
10. "FDA Issues Letters to Doctors...", <http://bit.ly/2DqFh4c>.
11. Kate White, "Unsealed Documents Reveal More About St. Albans Cocaine Maker," *Charleston Gazette-Mail* (WV), April 24, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2BDtDxT>.