

The Deadly Counterfeit Drug Trade Thrives in California

Sacramento, March 2016:
53 people overdosed
and 14 died after taking
counterfeit pills made
with fentanyl

Santa Cruz County,
October 2015:
Two people died after
taking counterfeit Xanax
made with fentanyl

San Diego and Imperial
Counties, 2017: Agents
reported confiscating
20,000 fentanyl-laced
pills in ten months

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.

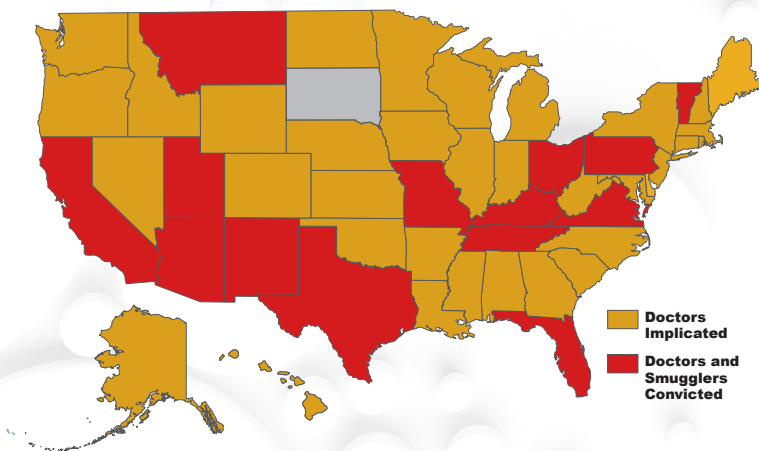
Fentanyl is a serious threat to Californians. Dozens of **northern California residents overdosed or died** after taking counterfeit pills in 2015 and 2016. In June 2017, authorities found 44 kilograms of fentanyl (at least 14 million fatal doses) in **Lemon Grove** and 1.77 grams of carfentanil (another 86,000 fatal doses) in **San Diego**.

516 California Doctors Linked to Fake Drug Rings

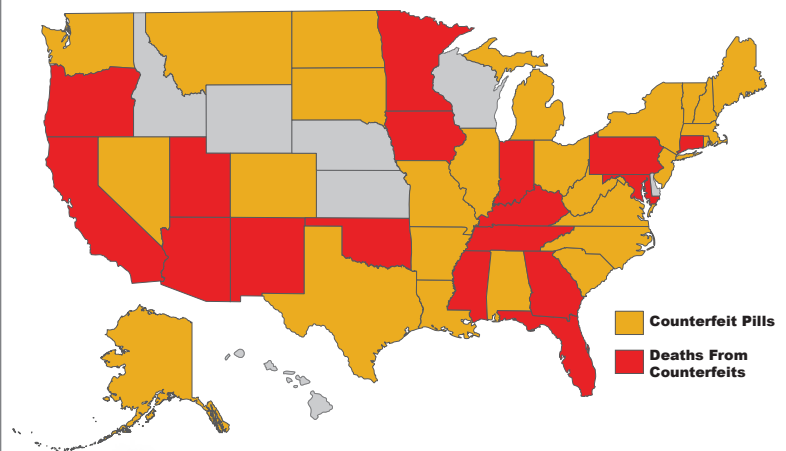
Counterfeit cancer drugs have touched California as well. 516 different medical practices in California have been implicated in various black market supply chains associated with counterfeit cancer treatments and other therapies. Families who have lost relatives to cancer will never know if their loved 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 Californian lives at risk of serious injury or death.

Fake Cancer Drug Crisis



Fentanyl-Laced Counterfeits & Related Deaths



Counterfeit and Black Market Drug Investigations in California (2012–2018)

Based on reported investigations.

Note that each investigation could have affected hundreds of California residents.

Fentanyl and Counterfeit Pills Containing Fentanyl

- February 2018:** Former San Francisco resident and fugitive Candelaria Vazquez received a sentence of 12 years after being found guilty in absentia.¹ She was one of three people arrested in June 2016 for manufacturing counterfeit oxycodone pills made with fentanyl.²
- December 2017:** Two Californians were arrested for operating a fentanyl pill mill that shipped over 500,000 counterfeit pills to New Jersey.³
- November 2017:** Customs and Border Protection at the Port of Los Angeles reported confiscating only two pill press in FY 2011. In FY 2017, the agency confiscated 396 pill presses.⁴
- October 2017:** Los Angeles resident, musician Tom Petty, suffered a heart attack and collapsed in his home. After his death, toxicology test results found two illicit fentanyl analogues—acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl—in his system.⁵
- October 2017:** In the first nine months of 2017, agents in San Diego and Imperial Counties reported seizing more than 20,000 counterfeit oxycodone pills.⁶
- June 2017:** DEA agents confiscated over 44 kilograms of fentanyl, enough to make 14 million fatal doses, during a traffic stop and house search in Lemon Grove.⁷
- June 2017:** Authorities searching a home in San Diego's Clairemont neighborhood found 1.77 grams of carfentanil, which a Postal Service inspector estimated was enough to kill 86,000 people.⁸
- May 2017:** Fentanyl was linked to at least 130 deaths in the Bay Area between January 2015 and May 2017.⁹
- February 2017:** Oakland resident David Beckford received a sentence of over 10 years for manufacturing and selling thousands of counterfeit Xanax made with fentanyl.¹⁰
- September 2016:** A man from Tijuana was arrested at the San Ysidro Port of Entry attempting to smuggle a load of drugs into the U.S., including 6,000 counterfeit pills made with fentanyl.¹¹
- March–April 2016:** Sacramento and Yolo County health officials reported that 53 people had overdosed and 14 had died after taking counterfeit Norco pills made with fentanyl.¹²
- October 2015:** Two people in Santa Cruz County and three in San Francisco died after taking counterfeit Xanax that contained fentanyl.¹³

Black Market and Counterfeit Cancer Drugs

- May 2016:** Dr. John F. Kiraly and his wife, Rena, of Lodi paid \$300,000 to settle allegations that they improperly billed Medicare for chemotherapy drugs they purchased from an unlicensed foreign supplier, Warwick Healthcare Solutions, Inc. Tests of one drug determined that it was counterfeit and lacked the active ingredient.¹⁴
- July 2015:** Dr. Neelesh Bangalore of Stockton paid \$736,000 to settle allegations that he improperly billed Medicare, Medicaid, and Tricare for chemotherapy drugs he purchased from an unlicensed foreign supplier, Warwick Healthcare Solutions, Inc. Tests of the drug determined that it was counterfeit and lacked the active ingredient.¹⁵
- April 2015:** The FDA sent warning letters to 53 California doctors and more than 270 nationwide to stop buying drugs from Gallant Pharmaceuticals, which sold more than 39 non-FDA approved medications.¹⁶
- February 2015:** Dr. Prabhjit S. Purewal of Manteca paid \$550,000 to settle allegations that he improperly billed Medicare for a variety of chemotherapy drugs purchased from Warwick Healthcare Solutions, an unlicensed foreign pharmaceutical distributor.¹⁷
- February 2014:** Alvarado Medical Plaza Pharmacy, Inc. was sentenced to repay Medicare over \$1 million, and fined \$10,000 for billing Medicare for unapproved oncology drugs. The pharmacy's owner, William Burdine, was sentenced to eight months home confinement, community service, and to pay a \$10,000 fine.¹⁸

- June 2013:** Dr. Joel Bernstein of La Jolla was ordered to pay a \$500,000 fine, forfeit \$1.2 million and make restitution to Medicare in the amount of \$1.7 million for purchasing unapproved foreign cancer drugs and billing Medicare as if the drugs were legitimate.¹⁹
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, including 103 doctors offices in California, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.²⁰
- February–June 2012:** 51 California doctors were among the 136 nationwide that received warning letters indicating that they may have purchased counterfeit Avastin or Altezuan from Quality Specialty Products (QSP), a CanadaDrugs subsidiary.²¹

Misbranded and Counterfeit Botox

- March 2016:** 194 doctors offices and practices in California were among more than 1,227 doctors nationwide who received warning letters from the FDA to stop buying infusion drugs from TC Medical Group, which sold more than \$33 million worth of non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Botox.²²
- July 2013:** The FDA warned 41 doctors and medical practices in California to stop purchasing fraudulent versions of Botox sold by Online Botox Pharmacy, Onlinebotox.com, and Onlinebotox.²³
- November 2012:** 67 California doctors were among the 350 nationwide that received warning letters indicating that they may have purchased counterfeit versions of Botox from Quality Specialty Products (QSP), a CanadaDrugs subsidiary.²⁴

Other Drugs and Medical Devices

- September 2017:** Diego Rafael Alvarez of Elysian Valley pleaded guilty to selling counterfeit drugs out of the back of his SUV.²⁵
- June 2017:** A Monterey Park woman was arrested and charged after a woman she injected with what was suspected to be silicone was hospitalized and had major corrective surgery as a result of the treatment.²⁶
- June 2017:** L.A. City Attorney Mike Feuer took steps to shut down Dulceria Del Valle, a Pacoima candy store, after its owners illegally sold prescription drugs without a license. Feuer warned the public that the medicines were counterfeit.²⁷
- March 2016:** Dr. Paul S. Singh of Tehachapi received a six-month jail sentence for implanting non FDA-approved IUDs he purchased online into his patients. After a visit in 2010 by the FDA, Singh promised to stop implanting those devices into his patients, but a second visit in 2012 found he was still doing so.²⁸
- October 2014:** Officials reported that 32 lawsuits had been filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court against Spinal Solutions, Inc, a California company that sold counterfeit screws used in spine and back surgery.²⁹
- September 2014:** Four members of a southern Californian family were indicted for selling counterfeit erectile dysfunction pills on Craigslist.³⁰ All of defendants pleaded guilty to trafficking counterfeit goods over the course of 2015.³¹
- July 2014:** An investigation in both Ventura and Los Angeles Counties found counterfeit medicines for sale in multiple shops. Tests revealed some of the medicines were made of plastic.³²
- September 2012:** Seven California doctors were among the 23 nationwide that received warning letters indicating that they may have purchased counterfeit versions of Probia and Aclasta from CanadaDrugs owned subsidiaries.³³

Footnotes

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