THE DEADLY COUNTERFEIT DRUG TRADE THRIVES IN ARIZONA

Counterfeit pills, intravenous and injectable medications have injured and even killed, Arizona patients.
Counterfeit drug smugglers lined their own pockets by infiltrating the illicit opioid market, the prescription drug supply and traditional Mexican markets to the detriment of Arizona’s residents.

Since 2015, the country has seen a terrible upsurge in counterfeit prescription pills laced with fentanyl or its deadlier variants. Even a fraction of a single pill can mean death in less than 30 minutes of ingesting it. In August 2019, federal authorities in Phoenix reported the seizure of more than one million fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills in the preceding 12 months—more than three times the number they had found in fiscal year 2018.1 Between September 2015 and March 2017, at least 32 people died after taking counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl in Maricopa County. Numbers for the rest of the state are not available.2 Newspapers have reported the deaths of fourteen more people—residents of Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff, Buckeye, Cottonwood, Prescott Valley, Peoria, and Gilbert—since then.3 Many more Arizona residents have likely died of fentanyl poisoning after encountering these pills, but not all opioid deaths are investigated for counterfeit drugs, and not all families publicly share their losses.

Unregulated prescription drugs—counterfeit Avastin, fake Botox, and black-market osteoporosis drugs, among others—have also touched Arizona. Between 2012 and 2016, 107 different medical practices in Arizona were among more than 3,000 nationwide that were implicated in various black-market supply chains associated with counterfeit cancer treatments and other therapies.4 Families of patients like Betty Hunter, a Chandler resident who died shortly after being treated with counterfeit Avastin in 2011, will never be sure whether their loved one’s lives were cut short by fake medicines smuggled into the country by profiteers.5 Between 2014 and 2016, authorities shut down 23 yerberias in Phoenix, Chandler, and Mesa that were selling counterfeit medicine which contained chemicals such as arsenic, boric acid and industrial solvents.6 Drugs purchased at some yerberias have caused kidney failure, developmental defects, and death. Others may never know their child died because the Xanax they took contained fentanyl instead of alprazolam, or that the medicine they purchased at a yerberia was contaminated with poison. The only way to protect Americans from these dangers is to protect and strengthen the closed U.S. supply chain, which holds drug manufacturers accountable for safety regulations.

To see a list of counterfeit drug incidents in Arizona between 2010 and 2018, please consult our 2018 Infosheet.

FOOTNOTES
1. “Over 1M Fentanyl Pills Have Been Seized in Arizona This Year,” KTAR News, August 23, 2019, [bit.ly/2qniQMy].
3. See footnotes for the map, above.

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FENTANYL PILL SEIZURES


REPORTED FENTANYL PILL DEATHS


**BLACK MARKET CANCER MEDICATION WARNINGS**


**COUNTERFEIT BOTOX WARNINGS**


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**WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT THE SAFETY OF YOUR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS**

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  - folded 11” x 17” pamphlet

- **Pill Press Infographic**
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- **Black Market Cancer Drugs, 2007–2018**
  - 8.5” x 11” flyer

- **Real Cases**
  - 8.5” x 11” flyer

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**COUNTERFEIT ANTIMICROBIALS**


**COUNTERFEIT E.D. DRUGS**