

The Deadly Counterfeit Drug Trade Thrives in South Carolina



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.

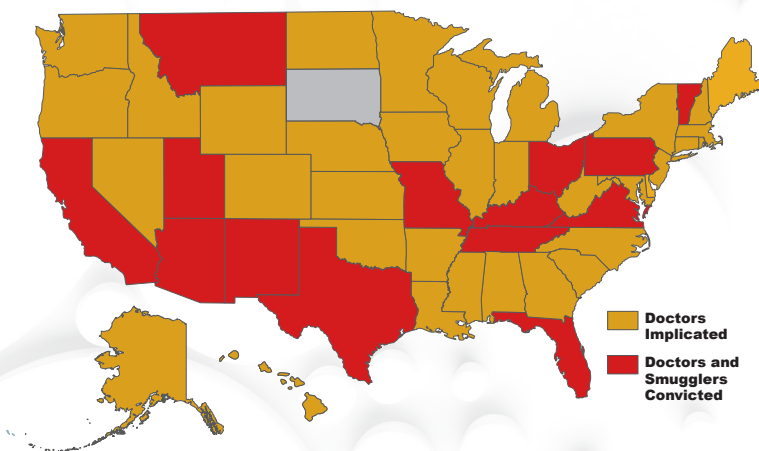
Fentanyl is a serious threat to South Carolina. Utah drug trafficker Aaron Shamo shipped counterfeit pills made with fentanyl South Carolina three times over a four-day period in November 2016. Since then, **fake fentanyl pills have been located in Rock Hill, Varnville, Ninety Six and Hilton Head**. In June 2018, police activity caused an unknown person to dump nearly 7,000 counterfeit pills on a Rock Hill street corner. That same month, authorities sentenced a Ladson man who had been selling fentanyl powder online to 20 years in prison.

41 South Carolina Doctors Linked to Fake Drug Rings

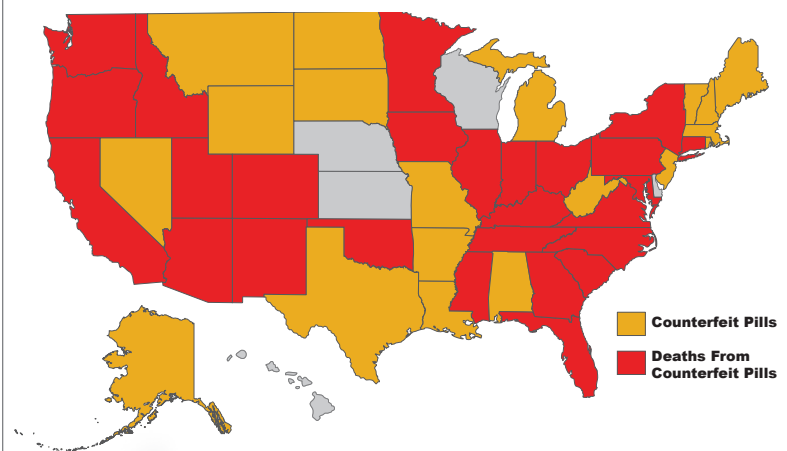
Counterfeit cancer drugs have touched South Carolina as well. 41 different medical practices in South Carolina have been implicated in various black market supply chains associated with counterfeit cancer treatments and other therapies. Families who have lost relatives to cancer will never know if their 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 South Carolina lives at risk of serious injury or death.

Fake Cancer Drug Crisis



Fentanyl-Laced Counterfeits & Related Deaths



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

Based on reported investigations.

Note that each investigation could have affected hundreds of South Carolina residents.

Fentanyl and Counterfeit Pills Containing Fentanyl

- June 2018:** A Varnville man, who allegedly supplied an Ohio-based multi-drug trafficking ring with counterfeit Percocet pills, was indicted along with 24 co-conspirators by the U.S. Department of Justice.¹
- June 2018:** Rock Hill Police discovered two pill presses and nearly 7,000 fentanyl pills dumped on the street while they raided 17 homes to stop a large drug trafficking ring.²
- June 2018:** Robert Bryan Mansfield of Ladson received a 20-year sentence for the online sale of fentanyl that led to the death of one person. In February 2017, the Department of Homeland Security seized two pounds of fentanyl in John F. Kennedy International Airport's airmail facility that was bound for Mansfield. Subsequently, postal inspectors intercepted ten packages Mansfield shipped, and agents confiscated three and one-half ounces of fentanyl in his home.³
- August 2017:** Michael Pridmore of Ninety Six died after taking counterfeit pills made with fentanyl. Octavious Vashon Calliham, the Greenwood resident who unwittingly sold him fentanyl-laced pills, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and distribution of fentanyl. He was sentenced to five years in prison and four years of probation in May 2018.⁴
- January 2017:** A Hilton Head man overdosed on a counterfeit fentanyl-laced oxycodone mixed with heroin.⁵
- November 2016:** Utah-based drug trafficker Aaron Shamo allegedly shipped three packages of counterfeit oxycodone made with fentanyl and two packages of counterfeit alprazolam to buyers in South Carolina.⁶

Black Market and Counterfeit Cancer Drugs

- April 2015:** The FDA sent warning letters to one South Carolina doctor and more than 270 nationwide to stop buying drugs from Gallant Pharmaceuticals, which sold more than 39 non-FDA approved medications.⁷
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, including 14 doctors' offices in South Carolina, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.⁸
- February–June 2012:** Two South Carolina doctors were among the 350 nationwide who received warning letters indicating that they may have purchased counterfeit versions of Avastin from Quality Specialty Products (QSP), a CanadaDrugs subsidiary.⁹

Misbranded and Counterfeit Botox

- August 2016:** Neurology Associates of Greenville, P.A. pleaded guilty to and was sentenced to three years probation for receiving misbranded Botox in interstate commerce. The practice, which had purchased non-FDA approved Botox from an Irish factory from 2010–2013, also paid \$300,000 in a parallel civil case.¹⁰
- March 2016:** The FDA warned 20 South Carolina 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.¹¹
- July 2013:** The FDA warned one medical practice in South Carolina to stop purchasing fraudulent versions of Botox sold by Online Botox Pharmacy, Onlinebotox.com, and Onlinebotox.¹²
- November 2012:** Three South Carolina doctors were among the 350 nationwide who received warning letters indicating that they may have purchased counterfeit versions of Botox from Quality Specialty Products (QSP), a CanadaDrugs subsidiary.¹³

Other Counterfeit Drugs

- March 2018:** In Charleston, Arturo Rafael Salazar Cruz was sentenced to 60 months in prison and three years supervised release for importing counterfeit pharmaceuticals, including Xanax and OxyContin, from China and India and selling them to people without prescriptions.¹⁴
- September 2017:** A woman in Rock Hill opened a package that she thought contained a yoga mat and found that it actually contained 20,000 counterfeit oxycodone pills.¹⁵
- August 2017:** Three men in Bluffton indicted for importing synthetic narcotics from China, manufacturing counterfeit Xanax and oxycodone pills in vacation rentals in Hilton Head, Kiawah and Fripp islands in South Carolina, and at Tybee Island in Georgia, and selling them the online.¹⁶
- March 2013:** Over a two-week period, agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations, working jointly with the South Carolina Secretary of State's Office, Blazer Investigations and Pfizer, seized approximately \$3.6 million in counterfeit pharmaceuticals including Viagra, Cialis and Proscar shipped from India to a warehouse in Columbia.¹⁷

Footnotes

1. "Twenty-five People Indicted for Their Roles in Conspiracy to Traffic Drugs in Elyria, including Fentanyl, Carfentanil, Heroin, Cocaine, Crack Cocaine and Fentanyl Analogues Pressed to Look Like Percocet," U.S. Department of Justice, June 27, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2pnUbzD>; Indictment, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, Case: 1:18-cr-00331-BYP, <http://bit.ly/2pn4nbH>.
2. Greg Suskin, "Pile of Powerful Pills Found on Rock Hill Street Possibly Linked to Massive Drug Raids," WSOCTV, June 15, 2018, <https://on.wsocvt.com/2pnbkJR>.
3. Angie Jackson, "Ladson Man Gets Prison for Distributing Fatal Dose of Fentanyl in International Operation," *The Post and Courier*, June 7, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2MRINpW>.
4. Damian Dominguez, "Family of Man Who Died of Overdose Hopes Dealer's Conviction Sets Precedent," *The Index-Journal*, May 18, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2plHeX5>.
5. Maggie Angst, "'People Are Dying Left and Right': This Hilton Head Man OD'd 3 Times on Opioids. And He's Not Alone," *The Island Packet*, August 18, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2pjf4Mm>.
6. Indictment, U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Case 2:16-cr-00631-DAK, <http://bit.ly/2mNteUl>.
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. "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. "Greenville Medical Practice Receives Probationary Sentence and Agrees to Pay \$300,000 to the United States," U.S. Department of Justice, August 29, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2MKIRXu>.
11. "FDA Issues Letters to Doctors...", <http://bit.ly/2DqFh4c>.
12. "Historical Information: FDA Issues Letters to Doctors...", <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.
13. "Historical Information: FDA Issues Letters to Doctors...", <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.
14. "Mexican Man Sentenced to Prison for Importing Counterfeit Drugs," U.S. Department of Justice, March 20, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2MMOWmq>.
15. Greg Suskin, "Woman Expecting Yoga Mat, Gets \$400,000 in Illegal Drugs in Mail Instead," WSOCTV, October 2, 2017, <https://on.wsocvt.com/2pokeGU>.
16. "Federal Indictment Handed Down in Clandestine Pill Laboratory Case," U.S. Department of Justice, August 16, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2pl7iBp> and John Monk, "South Carolina Pill Ring Used Bitcoins, 'Dark Web' and Vacation Beach Homes," *Greenville News*, July 13, 2018, <https://grnol.co/2pl8C7l>.
17. "HSI, Local Partners Seize Nearly \$4 Million in Counterfeit Pharmaceuticals, Goods," U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, March 8, 2013, <http://bit.ly/2pnkciD>.