

Young Californian Dies After Accidentally Taking Counterfeit Xanax



Carrie Luther with photo of Tosh

On October 26, 2015, 29-year-old Aptos, California resident Tosh Ackerman took a Benadryl and part of a Xanax pill to help him sleep. He never woke up, and his girlfriend found him dead the next day.

Ackerman was a respected member of his community and a devoted brother and friend. His death was a shock to everyone. In a condolence

letter to his mother, one customer who knew him from his job at a local grocery store characterized him as “genuine and pleasant.” “He cared about what I had to say,” she wrote. “He was a person who engaged with you, always with a smile and a kind word...[all] who knew Tosh felt the same way I did about him.”

Law enforcement investigating Tosh’s death found Benadryl and a quarter of a Xanax pill in a Motrin bottle in his room. A toxicology report revealed that he had overdosed on fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. FDA testing confirmed that Tosh’s Xanax was the source.

Fentanyl is a substantial part of the United States’ opioid epidemic, which claimed 42,249 lives in 2016. Drug traffickers in Mexico, Canada, and the United States import the drug and its analogues from China at a very meager cost. They mix fentanyl into illicit drugs like heroin to boost the potency of their products, but they also use industrial pill presses to manufacture counterfeit prescription pills that contain fentanyl. Hundreds of thousands of these pills have entered the U.S. market since 2014.

Tosh Ackerman would never have willingly taken a pill made of fentanyl. He thought he was taking prescription Xanax. His loss, as with so many others, is an American tragedy. People don’t know that counterfeit prescription drugs made with fentanyl are out there, or that they are risking their lives unless they buy their medicine from a licensed American pharmacy.

Tosh’s mother, Carrie Luther, is working hard to get the word out. “Since Tosh’s death,” she told us, “I have been committed to telling Tosh’s story to high school students, but want to do more. I believe that every time I speak I save lives. This epidemic is not over, and we need to take it seriously.” ■

46 States Have a Deadly Fentanyl Problem

What is in these fake pills?

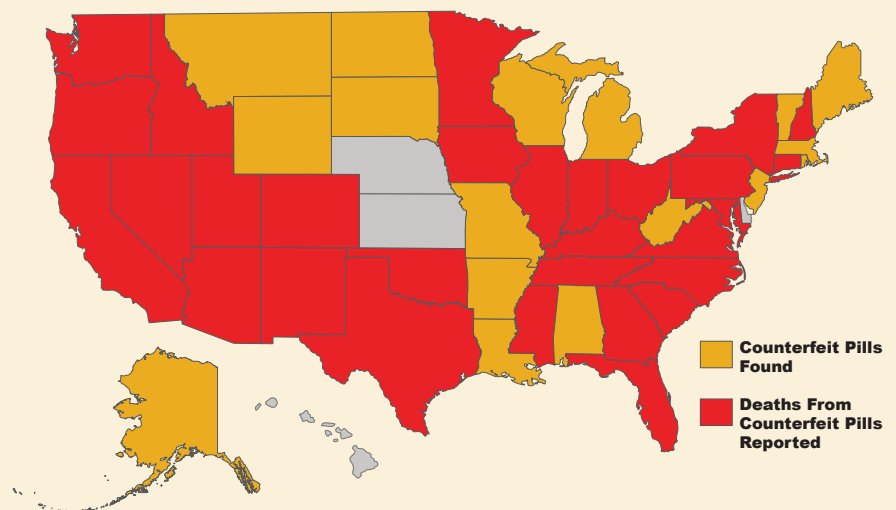
Pills that look like prescription painkillers, anti-anxiety meds, and even aspirin have all been found. They contain deadly doses of fentanyl or related analogues sourced from illegal labs overseas.

Where do they come from?

Mexican cartels and rogue Chinese manufacturers make finished pills which are then smuggled and mailed into the U.S. Illicit Chinese chemical companies also mail raw fentanyl and pill presses to ambitious U.S. drug dealers who then use them to make counterfeit prescription medication.

When did the epidemic start?

Cartels and dealers first mixed fentanyl into heroin in the 1990s, but the first reports of fake prescription medications made with fentanyl came in 2014.



As of January 2019, counterfeit fentanyl pills have been found in 46 states with confirmed deaths in 29. The full “46 States and Counting” update is available at <http://safedr.org/46states>