

# Counterfeit opioids, adulterated supplements, bootlegged steroids, and other fake drugs

## VIRGINIA HAS AN ACTIVE COUNTERFEIT MEDICINE MARKET.

In 2020, six counties reported **counterfeit fentanyl pills**, at least two deaths, and non-fatal poisonings. That brings the total number of Virginia counties reporting the pills to ten. Federal courts sentenced five people who **sold fentanyl pills and other drugs in the Hampton Roads region**. U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers intercepted **prohibited dermal fillers and counterfeit Botox** on their way to Virginia. Finally, a former doctor who spent three years rubber-stamping prescriptions for a foreign online pharmacy that sold U.S. residents addictive prescription drugs received a 10-month sentence.



**Northwest Virginia, January–October 2020: 17 people were poisoned, two fatally, after they took fake prescription pills made with fentanyl.**



**Central Virginia, August–November 2019: 17 men hospitalized after taking a supplement that contained undeclared prescription medicine.**



**Springfield, September 2015–November 2018: A man manufactured and sold steroids and prescription drugs in his home.**



## The view over the last ten years is almost as troubling.

In 2019, **17 Virginian men were hospitalized** after taking a supplement that contained an undeclared diabetes drug and **federal authorities shut down a lab in Springfield** that manufactured and sold steroids and fake prescription medicines.

In 2015, **law enforcement shuttered Gallant Pharmaceuticals**, a company in Arlington that claimed it was Canadian, but sold more than \$12.4 million in medications **shipped from unreliable sources in India, Switzerland, and Turkey**.

In 2011, local law enforcement seized counterfeit painkillers, birth control pills, antibiotics and other drugs that **sickened Fairfax County residents**.



## Doctors should also worry about counterfeits.

Between 2012 and 2015, the FDA warned 45 different medical practices in Virginia to stop buying cosmetic injectables and cancer treatments from unlicensed distributors that had been caught selling counterfeits.

**Weakening safety regulations for prescription medicines will only increase the threat. Protect Virginians by supporting the closed U.S. drug supply.**

# COUNTERFEIT AND BLACK MARKET DRUG INVESTIGATIONS IN VIRGINIA, 2011-2020



BASED ON REPORTED INVESTIGATIONS.

## FENTANYL AND COUNTERFEIT PILLS CONTAINING FENTANYL

- December 2020:** The Brunswick County Sheriff's Office warned that deputies had discovered counterfeit oxycodone pills made entirely of fentanyl.<sup>1</sup>
- October 2020:** Law enforcement reported that two deaths and 15 non-fatal overdoses in the northwest area of the state were attributable to counterfeit prescription pills made with fentanyl.<sup>2</sup>
- August 2020:** The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia sentenced five people to a combined 51 years of prison for their roles in a drug trafficking ring that distributed heroin, fentanyl—including counterfeit pills—and cocaine in the Hampton Roads region.<sup>3</sup>
- September 2019:** The Twin-County Drug Task Force concluded a two-year investigation by arresting two men in Floyd and seizing methamphetamine with a street value of \$1.4 million, \$300,000 worth of cocaine, and \$140,000 worth of counterfeit opioid pills suspected of containing fentanyl. According to the task force, the organization had distributed drugs in Carroll, Wythe, Floyd and Pulaski counties.<sup>4</sup>
- August 2019:** An investigation involving 120 law enforcement officers from 30 agencies, mostly in Virginia, but also in North Carolina and Texas kept 35 kilograms of fentanyl from ending up in Hampton Roads.<sup>5</sup>
- February 2018:** A Waynesboro resident died after taking a counterfeit pill laced with carfentanyl. Augusta County Circuit Court convicted Staunton resident Darryl B. McClurkin II of involuntary manslaughter for supplying the drugs.<sup>6</sup>
- January 2018:** The Chief Medical Examiner's office reported that fatal fentanyl overdoses increased by 177% from 2015 to 2016, and were projected to rise again in 2017.<sup>7</sup> A Virginia State Police special agent reported at a discussion panel that Virginians had died after taking fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills.<sup>8</sup>
- August 2017:** Police in Rockingham County seized nearly two kilograms of fentanyl during a traffic stop on I-81.<sup>9</sup>
- November 2016:** Utah-based drug trafficker Aaron Michael Shamo was found with 95,000 counterfeit Xanax and fentanyl-laced oxycodone pills on November 22nd. Court documents show that in just a five-day period in November, Shamo shipped 362 deadly counterfeit oxycodone pills to Virginia.<sup>10</sup> Aaron Michael Shamo received a life sentence in October 2020 after a jury found him guilty in August 2019.<sup>11</sup>

## BLACK MARKET AND COUNTERFEIT CANCER DRUGS

- April 2015:** The FDA warned 271 medical practices, five in Virginia, to stop buying medicine from unlicensed drug distributor Gallant Pharmaceuticals.<sup>12</sup> Gallant, a northern Virginia-based company that claimed it was Canadian, sold 39 non FDA-approved medications shipped in unsanitary 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>13</sup>
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, 10 in Virginia, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.<sup>14</sup>
- 2012-2013:** The FDA warned more than 500 medical practices across the country—five in Virginia—to stop buying from CanadaDrugs.com subsidiaries that had sold American doctors counterfeit Avastin.<sup>15</sup>

## OTHER DRUGS

- August 2020:** U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers in Cincinnati seized six shipments of prohibited dermal fillers and counterfeit Botox on their way to private residences in California, Texas, Florida, Virginia, Colorado, and Maryland.<sup>16</sup>
- June 2020:** Former Norfolk physician Lawrence B. Ryan received a ten-month sentence and an order to forfeit more than \$315,000 for approving more than 158,000 online drug orders for RX Limited, an foreign online pharmacy that sold U.S. residents drugs such as Fioricet, carisoprodol and tramadol without valid prescriptions.<sup>17</sup>

- November 2019:** Alexandria resident John Russell Kestel received a five-year sentence for manufacturing and distributing anabolic steroids, and money laundering.<sup>18</sup> Between 2015 and 2018, Kestel manufactured steroids as well as counterfeit Accutane, Ambien, Clomid, Finasteride, and an erectile dysfunction drug with raw materials he purchased from China and Canada, and sold them online to customers and resellers in the U.S. and Canada.<sup>19</sup>
- August–November 2019:** 17 men in Virginia required hospitalization for dangerously low blood sugar after taking a supplement that contained sildenafil and high doses of glyburide, a diabetes medication.<sup>20</sup>
- March 2016:** The FDA warned 23 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>21</sup>
- December 2011:** Fairfax County, Virginia police seized thousands of doses of counterfeit prescription medication from stores when residents were hospitalized after taking them. The drugs, which included painkillers, birth control pills, antibiotics and other drugs allegedly smuggled into the country from Central America.<sup>22</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

- Jon Burkett, "Sheriff Issues Warning About Pills Popping Up in County: 'You Will Die,'" *WTVR News*, December 3, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3bGPme2>.
- Evan Goodenow, "Police: Counterfeit Pills Blamed for Overdoses," *The Winchester Star*, October 29, 2020, <http://bit.ly/39Ai7WX>.
- "5 People Sentenced in Massive Local Drug Trafficking Conspiracy," *WTKR News*, August 6, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3nLaAKf>.
- Ryan Saylor and Brooke Williams, "Operation Trapdoor Results in \$2.1 Million of Meth Seized During Two-year Investigation," *WFXR*, October 16, 2019, <http://bit.ly/34a6sKQ>.
- "Virginia Drug Bust: 'Enough Fentanyl to Kill over 14 Million People,'" *WPMT FOX43*, August 31, 2019, <http://bit.ly/361RruV>.
- Brad Zinn, "Drug Dealer Convicted of Manslaughter in Overdose Death," *Staunton News Leader*, February 28, 2019, <http://bit.ly/335HjiV>.
- "Fatal Drug Overdose Quarterly Report, Third Quarter 2017," Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Virginia Department of Health, January 2018, <http://bit.ly/2nuKWgj>.
- Amy Friedenberger, "Med Beat: Fatal Opioid Overdoses Double in Roanoke Valley," *The Roanoke Times*, January 25, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2Bji5ZV>.
- "Va. Woman Charged in Record Fentanyl Seizure," *The Daily Progress*, December 1, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2GB0mI7>.
- Superseding Indictment, U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Central Division, Case No. 2:16-cr-00631-DAK, <http://bit.ly/2mGXeKE>.
- Dennis Romboy, "Judge Orders Utahn Who Sold Fentanyl-laced Pills on Darknet to Spend Life Behind Bars," *The Deseret News*, October 15, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3iextEA>, and "Utah Man Found Guilty of Running Nationwide Opioid Trafficking Ring," *The Deseret News*, August 30, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2XFCfBF>.
- "FDA Issues Letters to Doctors Who May Have Purchased Counterfeit or Unapproved Prescription Drugs," U.S. Food and Drug Administration, last updated July 3, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2DqFh4c>.
- Indictment, Case 1:13-cr-00130-CMH, U.S. 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," U.S. 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," U.S. Department of Justice, July 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2FpIbni>.
- "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 July 2, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.
- "Historical Information: FDA Issues Letters to Doctors...," <http://bit.ly/2rkvR5s>.
- "CBP Cincinnati Seizes Illegal, Dangerous Injectable Cosmetics" U.S. Customs and Border Protections, August 27, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3qjNtYP>.
- "Former Norfolk Doctor Sentenced for Role in Internet Pharmacy Organization," U.S. Department of Justice, June 19, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3ieQoiG>.
- "Alexandria Man Sentenced to Prison for Distributing Anabolic Steroids," U.S. Department of Justice, November 15, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2XFeecU>.
- Statement of Facts, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Virginia, Case No. 1:19-cr-00244-LO, <http://bit.ly/2rf7UNK>.
- Rachael Rettner, "Tainted Sexual Enhancement Supplements Linked with Dangerously Low Blood Sugar in 17 Men," June 18, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2LRkFb0>.
- "FDA Issues Letters to Doctors...," <http://bit.ly/2DqFh4c>.
- Natalie Lopez and Julie Carey, "Several Virginia Stores Raided in Counterfeit Prescriptions Investigation," *NBC 4 Washington*, December 2, 2011, <http://bit.ly/2FzTqJA>.