

An Epidemic Began With 14 Deaths



Jerome Butler

In a brutal month spanning March 23 to April 23 in 2016, fourteen people in the Sacramento area died of suspected drug overdoses, and 38 others were poisoned. At first, authorities could only suspect “contaminated drugs.” One month later, testing showed that the culprit was counterfeit pills made with deadly fentanyl.

Jerome Butler was one of the very first tragic deaths, just two days after the first reports of deaths from “contaminated pills.” Sacramento resident William Dossman took three Norco pills from his mother’s purse. He gave one to Jerome Butler and took two himself. Shortly after that, Jerome said that his “heart was hurting” and went to lie down with his 18-month-old daughter.

No one checked on him until the next morning when Jerome was found not breathing. A neighbor called 911 and performed CPR until the EMTs arrived. At the hospital, Jerome was put on life support. When it was clear he would not recover, his family agreed to unplug the machines. Jerome Butler died on March 30. Jerome’s family is heartbroken over losing him. 28-year-old Butler was a devoted father to his young daughter and his two sons, who were ten and four.

“Jerome was such a dad,” his mother, Natasha Butler, remembers. “He got up and fixed them breakfast, he made sure they had a proper lunch and cut off the edges of the bread.” He played football with his 10-year-old, taught him to write and color, and, as he grew older, “everything a young man needs to know.” “Jerome, that was my love. That was my heart,” his grandmother, Sheila Sheppard, told us, going on to explain that he supported his family, and was a good neighbor. “He was a lovely person. If he saw you walking with groceries he’d say, ‘Oh, you need a ride? Come on, I’ll give you a ride. You don’t have to be walking with them groceries.’ Everybody knew him.”

In July 2016, federal authorities arrested William Dossman’s mother Denise on three charges related to trafficking hydrocodone and fentanyl since June 2015. She pleaded not guilty and her trial is still pending. In May 2019, charges were filed against eight individuals in

federal court for allegedly manufacturing the counterfeit Norco pills that devastated the Sacramento area over three years’ ago.

No amount of prosecutions will bring back Natasha Butler’s beloved son. Had he only been warned, perhaps he would be alive today. She wants people to know: “There are evil people out here, and they don’t mind taking you out for a few dollars, and any [fake] pill you take could be your last.” ■

48 States Have a Deadly Fentanyl Problem

What is in these fake pills?

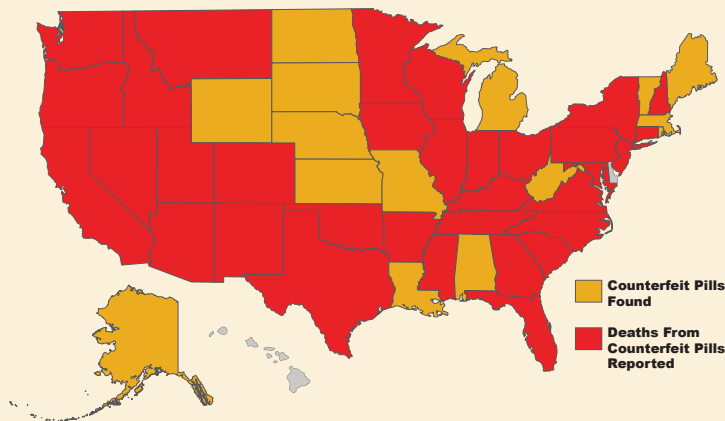
Pills that look like prescription painkillers, anti-anxiety meds, and even aspirin have all been found. They contain deadly doses of fentanyl or related analogues sourced from illegal labs overseas.

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 June 2019, counterfeit fentanyl pills have been found in 48 states with confirmed deaths in 33. The full “48 States and Counting” update is available at <http://safedr.org/48states>