

Rhode Islanders Must Look Out for Fake Medicines



PRESSED COUNTERFEIT PILLS MADE WITH FENTANYL ARE PLENTIFUL IN THE STATE.



Amid **an uptick in deaths attributed to fentanyl**, the Rhode Island Department of Health issued warnings in 2021 and 2020 that counterfeit pills disguised as prescription opioids and benzodiazepines were a serious threat to Rhode Island residents. 2020 also saw the sentencing of men in Coventry and Warwick to 30- and 32-years, respectively for **selling the counterfeit fentanyl pills** that killed a Massachusetts man. In 2019, **law enforcement stopped fentanyl pill rings or seized pills in Cranston, Johnston, Pawtucket, Providence, Warwick, and Woonsocket**. Over a seven-day period in **August 2020, 44 Rhode Island residents were treated for fentanyl poisoning because of fake pills**. Similar incidents stretch back to 2017.

March 2021, Providence:
A Massachusetts resident pleaded guilty to importing, repackaging and selling illegal steroids across the country.



December 2019, Warwick:
State Police seized a high volume pill press and multiple drugs, including fentanyl.



September 2019, Cranston:
police arrested a man after finding fentanyl, MDMA, and two pill presses in his home.



Rhode Island is also plagued with illegal steroids, dangerous supplements and black market prescription drugs.

In March 2021, a Massachusetts man pleaded guilty in Rhode Island federal court to **leading a ring that imported raw steroids and repackaged and sold them across the U.S.** Law enforcement broke up additional steroid-trafficking operations in Charlestown in 2017 and Coventry in 2011.

In 2016, a Cranston man pleaded guilty to **buying pharmaceuticals overseas, repackaging them with forged labels and selling them as FDA-approved medication.** The FDA warned another six medical practices in Rhode Island to stop buying from unlicensed distributors that had been caught selling counterfeit medicines between 2012 and 2016.

Rhode Island residents were also prosecuted for **selling “herbal” supplements that contained undeclared male enhancement drugs** in 2019 and 2011.

Rhode Islanders deserve a safe and effective drug supply: protect all U.S. patients by securing and strengthening the U.S. drug supply chain.

COUNTERFEIT AND BLACK MARKET DRUG INVESTIGATIONS IN RHODE ISLAND, 2010-2021



BASED ON REPORTED INVESTIGATIONS.

COUNTERFEIT PILLS MADE WITH FENTANYL

- November 2020:** A Providence man was arrested after he allegedly sold fentanyl pills to an undercover agent in Milford, Massachusetts.¹
- October 2020:** The Rhode Island Department of Health warned residents about counterfeit prescription opioids and benzodiazepines made with fentanyl.²
- March 2020:** Coventry resident David Grimaldi and Warwick resident Robert Bell received 30- and 32-month sentences, respectively, for selling the counterfeit fentanyl pills that killed a Massachusetts man in July 2017.³
- December 2019:** State Police arrested a father and a son in Warwick after seizing multiple drugs, including fentanyl, and a large-scale electric pill press from their home.⁴
- December 2019:** Pawtucket resident Matthew Heal received a 15-year sentence after he pleaded guilty to possessing more than 10,000 counterfeit pills containing fentanyl.⁵
- December 2019:** The High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force arrested a Johnston man and seized 238 fentanyl pills, 19 pounds of marijuana and two firearms.⁶
- November 2019:** 13 people were charged for their alleged roles in a Providence-based drug trafficking ring. The investigation yielded 1,100 grams of fentanyl, 610 fentanyl pills and other drugs.⁷
- September 2019:** Cranston police arrested a man after a search of his residence yielded 78 grams of fentanyl, 68 grams of MDMA, two pill presses and 35 pressed pills.⁸
- August 2019:** The Rhode Island Department of Health announced that over a seven-day period 44 residents in Coventry, Cranston, Providence and West Warwick had survived fentanyl poisoning after taking counterfeit pills.⁹
- July 2019:** A four-month Federal Bureau of Investigations operation led to the arrest of 12 Woonsocket residents for their alleged roles in at least three drug trafficking conspiracies. Over the course of the investigation, law enforcement seized 1,964 fentanyl pills, 116 grams of fentanyl powder and more than 550 grams of other drugs.¹⁰
- August 2018:** A man in Woonsocket was poisoned after taking two Percocets pills that police believed were actually counterfeits made with fentanyl.¹¹
- June 2018:** A Pawtucket resident was indicted for his role in a major fentanyl pill manufacturing ring. Prosecutors alleged that he manufactured up to 40,000 fake fentanyl pills at a time between 2015 and 2017.¹²
- April 2018:** A search of a residence in Pawtucket led to the seizure of multiple drugs, including approximately 550 counterfeit pills made with fentanyl.¹³
- February 2018:** Newport police arrested an East Providence man and seized 100 fentanyl pills as well as heroin, cocaine and fentanyl powder after he fled the scene of a narcotics sting.¹⁴
- July 2017:** State police found 325 fentanyl pills in the car of an East Providence man who they identified as a “large-scale distributor of fentanyl-laced pills.”¹⁵

BLACK MARKET AND COUNTERFEIT CANCER DRUGS

- June 2016:** Arif Diwan, a Cranston businessman, pleaded guilty to charges that he and his company, Lifescreen LLC, sold pharmaceuticals purchased from India and other countries as FDA-approved medication. Diwan purchased the drugs abroad, then repackaged and forged labels for them in Rhode Island.¹⁶
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 medical practices, including three doctors’ offices in Rhode Island, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.¹⁷

MISBRANDED AND COUNTERFEIT BOTOX

March 2016: The FDA warned three Rhode Island 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.¹⁸

OTHER COUNTERFEIT DRUGS AND MEDICAL DEVICES

March 2021: David Esser of North Attleboro, Massachusetts pleaded guilty in Rhode Island federal court to leading a ring that imported raw steroids and repackaged and sold them to buyers across the country.¹⁹

June 2019: Jeffrey Guzman of Providence pleaded guilty to selling more than 500,000 capsules of a misbranded erectile dysfunction drug, falsely claiming that it was an all-natural herbal supplement.²⁰

November 2017: Former Charlestown police officer Evan Speck received three years probation and 1,000 hours of community service for importing and repackaging testosterone cypionate from China and elsewhere and selling it on the web.²¹

April 2016: Pawtucket resident Ricky Lugo received a 12-month sentence and was required to pay \$104,239 in restitution for importing erectile dysfunction drugs he knew were counterfeit and selling them on the internet.²²

April 2013: Edmond Paolucci of Coventry was sentenced to serve 33 months in federal prison for his role in an Israel-based criminal enterprise that imported steroids and misbranded pharmaceuticals into the United States for sale via the Internet. His co-defendant, Cranston resident Patrick Cunningham, received an 18-month sentence in August 2013.²³

February 2011: Rhode Island resident Anny L. Puello pleaded guilty to illegally smuggling erectile dysfunction drugs into the country from the People's Republic of China and selling them, falsely labeled as herbal supplements.²⁴

June 2010: The Rhode Island Department of Health announced an investigation of 28 providers in 10 Rhode Island OB-GYN medical offices who had illegally imported non-FDA approved IUDs and inserted them into patients.²⁵

Footnotes

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