

Maine's Fake Pill Problem Mirrors Other States

THE FENTANYL PILL PROBLEM IS GETTING WORSE IN MAINE.

While Maine's population is relatively small, it has not been spared by fentanyl or counterfeit pills containing fentanyl. A former police officer faced charges in May 2021 of providing hydrocodone pills and fentanyl powder to a high school student in Harrison. In April 2021, an Owl's Head resident was indicted for their role in a drug trafficking organization that shipped counterfeit pills made with fentanyl to customers across the country. In March 2021, the City of Portland warned the public that counterfeit oxycodone pills were being sold in the community after a woman died of fentanyl poisoning from a pill she took.



Black market prescription medicines have also made an appearance in Maine.

In 2018, the parent company of Canada Drug Center was ordered to pay millions for selling Americans misbranded medicines. Canada Drug Center was an online pharmacy that sold prescription drugs to Maine residents during the brief period when drug importation was legal in Maine. Between 2012 and 2016, the FDA warned eight Maine doctors to stop buying oncology drugs and Botox from unlicensed sellers that had been caught selling counterfeits.

March 2021, Portland: A public warning was issued about counterfeit oxycodone made with fentanyl after a woman was killed by one of the pills.



March 2020, Surry: Adam Fitzherbertt sentenced to two years in prison for selling counterfeit oxycodone pills made with carfentanil.



July 2019, Portland: Colin Harle pleaded guilty to producing and selling counterfeit Xanax.



Maine residents deserve effective medicine that they can trust. A secure U.S. drug supply chain is the best way to keep them safe.

COUNTERFEIT AND BLACK MARKET DRUG INVESTIGATIONS IN MAINE, 2012-2021



FENTANYL AND COUNTERFEIT PILLS MADE WITH FENTANYL

- May 2021:** A former Calais police officer faced a 35-count indictment which included charges for allegedly supplying the hydrocodone pills and fentanyl powder found at Narraguagus High School in Harrington.¹
- April 2021:** A resident of Owl's Head was one of multiple defendants charged in Vermont for their roles in a drug and money laundering conspiracy that trafficked a variety of illicit substances, including fentanyl pills made to look like legitimate pharmaceuticals, into communities across the country.²
- March 2021:** The City of Portland issued a public warning about counterfeit oxycodone pills made with fentanyl after a woman died after taking a suspected fentanyl pill.³
- July 2020:** Police arrested a man for allegedly distributing counterfeit Percocet pills made with fentanyl that investigators tied to a fatal fentanyl poisoning in May.⁴
- March 2020:** Adam Fitzherbert of Surry received a prison sentence of two years in prison after pleading guilty to the sale of counterfeit drugs. Investigators searched Fitzherbert's home in February 2018 and seized 91 fake oxycodone pills that later tested positive for carfentanil.⁵
- February 2020:** Agents with the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency seized more than two pounds of fentanyl in both pill and powder forms while searching an apartment in Portland.⁶
- August 2019:** James Cox of Edmond Township received an 18-month prison sentence after pleading guilty to distributing fentanyl and counterfeit drugs. According to court documents, in October 2017 Cox sold fake Percocet pills that contained fentanyl to an individual, and in February 2018 sold counterfeit oxycodone pills made with carfentanil to another person.⁷
- February 2018:** Statewide 418 people in Maine died of drug overdoses in 2017 with authorities blaming the increase from the previous year on fentanyl and fentanyl analogues.⁸
- October 2017:** Lewiston man arrested at Knox County Regional Airport in possession of over 100 counterfeit oxycodone pills that are allegedly made with fentanyl.⁹
- November 2016:** A Utah-based drug counterfeiting operation shipped buyers in Maine fentanyl-laced counterfeit oxycodone pills.¹⁰

BLACK MARKET AND COUNTERFEIT CANCER DRUGS

- May 2013:** The FDA warned 780 doctors, one in Maine, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.¹¹

MISBRANDED AND COUNTERFEIT BOTOX

- March 2015:** Six Maine doctors and more than 1,200 nationwide were sent letters telling them to stop buying from Canadian distributor TC Medical, which sold 22 different kinds of non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Botox.¹²
- November 2012:** One Maine doctor was among over 350 U.S. medical practices that 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

- July 2019:** Colin Harle of Portland pleaded guilty to holding for sale counterfeit drugs and possession of a firearm in furtherance of drug trafficking. Initial investigation of Harle began after he purchased a pill press, molds and chemicals online.¹⁴ Police arrested Harle after he attempted to sell 1,000 fake Xanax pills to an undercover officer in August 2018. A search of a safe hidden in a wooded area in Westbrook turned up another 20,000 counterfeit Xanax pills.¹⁵ Harle received a 60-month prison sentence in October 2019.¹⁶

- July 2018:** Quantum Solutions, SRL, the parent company of a Canadian online pharmacy that marketed pharmaceuticals to Mainers as Canada Drug Center¹³ during Maine's brief legalization of drug importation, agreed to pay a \$150,000 fine and forfeit more than \$4 million for selling misbranded drugs to Americans.¹⁷
- November 2013:** Tests performed by Dr. Kenneth McCall of the Maine Board of Pharmacy on drugs purchased from Canada Drug Center found all were substandard, one contained an unknown contaminant, and none of them were from Canada.¹⁸ Independent testing performed by WGME News found similar results.¹⁹

Footnotes

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4. "U.S. Attorney Halsey Frank Reports on Operation S.O.S. Two Years After Its Launch," U.S. Department of Justice, September 25, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2TfN2UG>.
5. "Surry Man Sentenced for Trafficking in Counterfeit Pills Containing Carfentanyl," U.S. Department of Justice, March 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3xWvWKe>.
6. "Maine Drug Agents Seize 2 Pounds of Fentanyl Valued at \$140,000," *WABI-TV*, February 5, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3x7SCXM>.
7. "Edmond Township Man Sentenced to 1½ Years for Distribution of Fentanyl and Counterfeit Prescription Drugs," U.S. Department of Justice, August 20, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3h4Km53>.
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11. "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>.
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14. "Annual Report 2018", Maine Drug Enforcement Agency, June 17, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3h8Qc5r>.
15. "Portland Man Pleads Guilty to Holding for Sale Counterfeit Drugs and Possessing a Firearm in Furtherance of Drug Trafficking," U.S. Department of Justice, July 16, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3h4zCUj>.
16. Judgment in a Criminal Case, U.S. District Court, District of Maine, Case No. 2:19-cr-00016-DBH, <https://bit.ly/3xksngE>.
17. Chuck Biedka, "Canadian Company Ordered to Forfeit Millions in Drug Mislabeling Scheme," *The Tribune-Review*, July 31, 2018, <http://bit.ly/3619SAM>.
18. "Maine Importation," Partnership for Safe Medicines, April 15, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2DXPFfQ>.
19. "Kenneth McCall Conducts Lab Analysis for WGME News Investigation of Online Prescription Drugs," University of New England, November 14, 2013, <https://bit.ly/2GrNHK3>.