

# Counterfeit Xanax, fake opioids, and smuggled black market medicine threaten Illinois



## THE COUNTERFEIT PILL CRISIS CONTINUES IN ILLINOIS.

In 2020, news reported **eight instances of counterfeit pill poisonings** across the state, three of which were fatal. These new instances followed **counterfeit oxycodone, Xanax and tramadol traffickers** who either worked in Illinois or targeted its residents, and the **fentanyl poisoning death of a 19-year-old in Cary**.



## IT ISN'T ONLY FAKE OPIOIDS AND XANAX:

in 2021 and 2020 Customs and Border Protection agents in Chicago intercepted **Viagra pills, steroids and prefilled syringes of an osteoarthritis treatment** being smuggled from unknown sources overseas. Other significant cases of illegally imported counterfeit medicines in Illinois stretch back as far as 2010.



**November 2020: An 18-year-old music education student died of fentanyl poisoning in Harvard after she took a counterfeit oxycodone.**



**October 2020: Authorities reported that Illinois residents had suffered five counterfeit pill-related poisonings, two of them fatal.**



**2017-2018: A Champaign man manufactured and sold at least 4.3 million counterfeit Xanax pills on the dark web.**



## Counterfeit medicines have reached Illinois medical practices, as well.

Between 2012 and 2016, the **Food and Drug Administration warned 135 different doctors' offices and clinics to stop purchasing cancer treatments and cosmetic injectables from unlicensed suppliers** who had been caught selling counterfeit products. Families who have lost relatives to cancer will never know whether their loved ones were given fake medicine or if they died from a lack of treatment.



**Illinois residents deserve to know that their medicine is effective and that it won't kill them. Support a strong, closed drug supply chain to protect them.**

# COUNTERFEIT & BLACK MARKET DRUG INCIDENTS IN ILLINOIS, 2010-2021



BASED ON REPORTED INVESTIGATIONS.

## FENTANYL AND COUNTERFEIT PILLS MADE WITH FENTANYL

- January 2021:** A federal court filed charges against a Bradley resident after police seized a package that contained almost 550 grams of fentanyl in pill form in the defendant's apartment.<sup>1</sup>
- December 2020:** Harvard police charged a 20-year-old man for allegedly delivering the counterfeit oxycodone made with fentanyl that killed 18-year-old Catherine Hannon on November 22, 2020.<sup>2</sup>
- May 2020:** Police arrested two Taylorville residents who allegedly supplied counterfeit Xanax made with fentanyl to two teenagers via social media. The teens suffered from fentanyl poisoning after taking the pills, but survived.<sup>3</sup>
- February 2020:** California resident Melissa Scanlan, "The Drug Llama," received a 13-year sentence in federal prison for distributing more than 50,000 counterfeit oxycodone made with fentanyl as well as other counterfeit and misbranded pills to southern Illinois and across the country.<sup>4</sup> A co-conspirator, Brandon Arias, pleaded guilty and received a nine-year sentence November 2019.<sup>5</sup>
- May 2018:** 19-year-old Rachel Ramirez died in Cary after taking a counterfeit fentanyl pill. Her boyfriend, Jacob Reis pleaded guilty to delivering the pill, and received a four-year sentence in March 2019.<sup>6</sup>
- August 2017:** Cook County, Illinois recorded a 2,700 percent increase in overdoses caused by fentanyl from 2014 to 2016. In 2014 there were 582 fatal overdoses due to fentanyl and in 2016 there were 3,946.<sup>7</sup>
- November 2016:** A Utah-based drug counterfeiting operation headed by Aaron Shamo shipped buyers in Illinois counterfeit oxycodone pills made with fentanyl.<sup>8</sup> Shamo received a life sentence in October 2020.<sup>9</sup>
- February 2016:** Illinois State Police issued a warning about counterfeit Xanax pills made with fentanyl being available on the street.<sup>10</sup>

## BLACK MARKET AND COUNTERFEIT CANCER DRUGS

- April 2016:** Dr. Ann Kinnealey relinquished her controlled substance license and her physician and surgeon license after the Illinois State Medical Board found that she bought misbranded cancer medication from Quality Specialty Products, a supplier of counterfeit Avastin and subsidiary of CanadaDrugs.<sup>11</sup>
- April 2015:** The FDA sent letters to seven Illinois doctors and more than 271 nationwide warning them to stop buying drugs from Gallant Pharmaceuticals, which sold more than 39 non-FDA approved medications.<sup>12</sup>
- May 2013:** The FDA warned 781 doctors, 34 in Illinois, to stop doing business with unlicensed drug seller Medical Device King, which had sold 31 non-FDA approved medications, including counterfeit Avastin.<sup>13</sup>
- February–June 2012:** Ten Illinois doctors were among the 136 nationwide that received warning letters indicating that they may have purchased counterfeit Avastin or Altzuan from Quality Specialty Products (QSP), a CanadaDrugs subsidiary.<sup>14</sup>

## MISBRANDED/COUNTERFEIT BOTOX AND BEAUTY TREATMENTS

- March 2016:** 52 Illinois doctors and more than 1,225 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. Four Illinois doctors had to be warned a second time for buying from TC Medical.<sup>15</sup>
- February 2015:** Christopher Carstens, owner of Orthopedic Solutions, Inc., received five years probation and a \$50,000 fine for distributing more than \$3 million in misbranded and illegally imported Botox & Juvederm.<sup>16</sup>
- July 2013:** The FDA warned seven doctors and medical practices in Illinois to stop purchasing fraudulent versions of Botox sold by Online Botox Pharmacy, Onlinebotox.com, and Onlinebotox.<sup>17</sup>
- November 2012:** 25 Illinois doctors were 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.<sup>18</sup>

## OTHER COUNTERFEIT DRUG INCIDENTS

- February 2021:** U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at Chicago O’Hare International Airport seized 3,200 Viagra pills worth an estimated \$96,000 from a traveler who said that he was going to share them with friends.<sup>19</sup>
- January 2021:** CBP in Chicago intercepted two shipments of illegally imported steroid pills on their way from Lithuania to Albuquerque, New Mexico.<sup>20</sup>
- October 2020:** The Illinois Poison Control Center and the Cook County Department of Public Health reported that there had been five counterfeit pill-related poisonings, two of which were fatal.<sup>21</sup>
- October 2020:** CBP at the Chicago International Mail Facility seized a shipment of 200 prefilled syringes of an osteoarthritis treatment called sodium hyaluronate. The non-FDA approved drugs were being shipped from South Korea to a business in Chicago.<sup>22</sup>
- January 2020:** Stephan Caamano of Champaign received a 13-year prison sentence for manufacturing and distributing at least 4.3 million counterfeit Xanax pills on the dark web in 2017 and 2018.<sup>23</sup>
- September 2019:** La Salle County’s Tri-County Drug Enforcement Narcotics Team warned that home-pressed counterfeit Xanax had sickened area residents.<sup>24</sup>
- March 2018:** Champaign resident Skyler Prah received a sentence of one year and one day with three years supervised release for making over 80,000 homemade tramadol capsules and selling them throughout the United States.<sup>25</sup>
- January 2016:** Chicago pharmacist Michael Mankiewicz, whose license was revoked in 2012, was sentenced to a year in prison for importing shipments of counterfeit erectile dysfunction drugs from China.<sup>26</sup>
- July 2014:** Chicago resident Faye Al-Jabri received a 41-month prison sentence for smuggling thousands of counterfeit erectile dysfunction pills from China into the United States.<sup>27</sup>
- December 2010:** During an investigation of a local businessman, authorities in Naperville found that he possessed 20,000 counterfeit Valium pills and 20,000 counterfeit Xanax pills. They suspected the drugs were manufactured in China.<sup>28</sup>
- July 2010:** A 44-year-old man from Orland Park faced charges after Will County authorities found 200,000 counterfeit pills made to look like an unspecified Pfizer product.<sup>29</sup>

## Footnotes

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