

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: DEA Warns About Fentanyl, Meth-Laced Pills

A recent article in The Washington Post interviews Anne Milgram, administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) regarding her address to a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Capitol Hill where she issued a public warning that a growing number of fake pills bought online are laced with potentially lethal amounts of the synthetic opioid fentanyl, and blamed social media sites for not doing more to protect their users. According to Milgram, the amounts are staggering and counterfeit pills are fueling overdoses.

The United States saw a record number of drug overdose deaths last year — more than 93,000, an increase of almost 30 percent from 2019. Officials said the DEA hasn't issued such a public safety alert since 2015, when the agency warned that agents were seeing an alarming amount of heroin laced with fentanyl. Fentanyl, even in much smaller amounts, is deadlier than street heroin. The new public safety alert warns Americans that counterfeit pills, often sold on social media or e-commerce websites, increasingly contain fentanyl or sometimes methamphetamine, posing health risks beyond the dangers of buying prescription pills. The DEA has seized 9.6 million counterfeit pills already this year, which is more than it seized in the previous two years combined. The number of seized counterfeit pills found to contain fentanyl has jumped 430 percent since 2019.

The United States has been grappling with a worsening drug epidemic since 1999, fueled primarily by an explosion of opioid use. At first, that drug abuse centered around prescription pain pills, such as Oxycodone, Vicodin or Percocet. In recent years, the death toll has risen sharply, fueled in large part by fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is relatively cheap to manufacture and distribute. Last year, drug overdoses killed more than twice as many Americans as car crashes. Many drug overdoses are the result of ingesting more than one drug, but experts say fentanyl is often involved. Part of the problem lies in the common assumption, particularly by young people, that a pill purchased online must be made in a reputable lab somewhere and, therefore, must not be too dangerous. Often the pills contain a chemical variant, or analog, of fentanyl. People may look at them and think it looks like a Percocet, and then even if they hear it's got fentanyl, they still think it's safe.

Milgram said the illicit drug trade in the United States is increasingly shifting from plant-based products like cocaine or heroin to chemical-driven manufacturing. Often, those pills are sold online as Oxycodone, Percocet or Adderall. But in truth, the pills contain fentanyl or methamphetamine.

Many of the counterfeit pills that alarm the DEA are being sold on social media platforms such as Snapchat and TikTok, Milgram said: “The drug dealer isn’t just standing on a street corner anymore. It’s sitting in a pocket on your phone. Social media is not doing enough to deal with this,” she said, while emphasizing that the first priority is warning the public. “We have not gone to them yet with specific demands, but we will at some point go to them.”

TikTok maintains content and accounts promoting illicit drug sales are not allowed and will be removed. Experts and regulators will be engaged to strengthen safeguards and promote safety and well-being of the TikTok community. When asked about online drug sales, a spokesperson for Snapchat said the company is committed to doing everything we can to strictly prohibit drug-related activity and aggressively enforce against these violations, and support law enforcement in their investigations.

The Drug Enforcement Administration is a United States federal law enforcement agency under the United States Department of Justice, tasked with combating drug trafficking and distribution within the United States. For more information please visit www.dea.gov.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled. “Keeping Glen Cove SAFE,” in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE’s website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org.