

Authorities find 15,000 rainbow fentanyl pills in Lego box, largest seizure of the drug in NYC history, DEA says

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DEA

Authorities allegedly found 15,000 rainbow fentanyl pills in a Lego box in the largest seizure of the drug in New York City history.

**CNN** — Federal authorities have accused a New Jersey woman of concealing approximately 15,000 rainbow-colored fentanyl pills in a Lego box a part of a drug trafficking scheme, in what US Drug Enforcement Administration authorities said in a news release is the largest seizure of the drug New York City history.

Latesha Bush, 48, pleaded not guilty last week at an arraignment in Manhattan Criminal Court, a spokesperson for the prosecutor said. She was charged with one count of first-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance and one count of third-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, according to a criminal complaint.

Bush is expected to appear in court again October 18, according to online court records.

The New York County Defender Services gave CNN a “no comment” on behalf of Bush’s attorney.

“Using happy colors to make a deadly drug seem fun and harmless is a new low, even for the Mexican cartels,” NYC Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan said in the release.

She said fentanyl is involved in more than 80% of overdose deaths in the city.

“If you take any drug sold on the street or through the internet, regardless of its medicinal markings or festive appearance, you risk your life,” she added.

Rainbow fentanyl comes in bright colors and can be used in the form of pills or powder that contain the powerful synthetic opioid, making them extremely addictive and potentially deadly if someone overdoses.

The DEA released a warning in August advising the public of this “alarming emerging trend.” DEA Administrator Anne Milgram called rainbow fentanyl “a deliberate effort by drug traffickers to drive addiction among kids and young adults.”

The news comes as Halloween approaches, a time when authorities often warn families to inspect candy before eating.

Federal and local drug enforcement officials arrested Bush, who is from Trenton, New Jersey, while they were conducting surveillance September as part of an ongoing investigation into narcotics trafficking, the complaint said.

Bush allegedly carried a black tote bag wrapped around a large object as she entered a vehicle in Manhattan, according to the complaint.

When the officers stopped the vehicle, a detective found Bush in the rear seat with two black tote bags and a yellow Lego container holding “approximately 15,000 round multi-colored alleged fentanyl pills marked ‘M30,’” the complaint said.

"Disguising fentanyl as candy – and concealing it in children's toys – will never hide the fact that fentanyl is a deadly poison that harms our communities, our families, and our city," New York Police Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell said.

Investigators believe the pills originated in Mexico. They said the case highlights the tactics of two major cartels.

"The Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel are mass-producing fentanyl pills in rainbow colors to not only brand their products, but use colors and dyes to mimic candy and/or legitimate prescription drugs," authorities said in the news release.

Rainbow fentanyl has been receiving attention due to the bright colors of the products, but the illicit fentanyl that the products contain represents a continuation of the ongoing opioid epidemic. The only difference between rainbow fentanyl and the fentanyl products of the past appears to be the coloring.

"The reason it's colored is just to differentiate products. If we had a regulated market, they would be differentiated in different ways – we do not. It has nothing to do with marketing to kids at all, period, whatsoever," Maya Doe Simkins – co-founder of the Opioid Safety and Naloxone Network and co-director of Remedy Alliance, a collection of harm reduction groups that work to make naloxone more accessible – told CNN last month.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid intended to help people such as cancer patients manage severe pain. It's 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. It's used illicitly because of its heroin-like effect, and even small doses can be deadly.

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CNN's Jaqueline Howard, Ben Tinker and Katherine Dillinger contributed to this report.