

U.S.

DOJ Announces Major Fentanyl Arrest of Chinese Nationals

BY **KATHERINE FUNG AND NAVEED JAMALI** ON 6/23/23 AT 12:00 PM EDT



U.S.

FENTANYL

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

CHINA

INDICTMENT



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The [Department of Justice](#) (DOJ) has indicted eight Chinese nationals and arrested two for alleged fentanyl manufacturing, distribution and more, a move that current and former federal officials confirmed to *Newsweek* ahead of the announcement.

Three China-based chemical companies and eight Chinese nationals were charged with conspiracy to manufacture and distribute fentanyl, the DOJ said during a Friday press conference. Prosecutors said two of the eight employees have been taken into custody, including a corporate executive and marketing manager.

"When companies and employees, including those in the C-suite knowingly fuel the fentanyl crisis, they will be held to account. We will expose them as drug traffickers," Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said.

Derek Maltz, former special agent in charge of DEA's Special Operations Division, told *Newsweek* that the arrests "mark the first time ever the DOJ announced indictments against Chemical companies and executives in China."



In this photo a mix of heroin and fentanyl on a street in Kensington on July 19, 2021, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics, more than 93,000 people died from drug overdoses last year in America.

SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

The first-of-its-kind law enforcement action underscores just how aggressively the U.S. is cracking down on the production of fentanyl, a highly addictive synthetic opioid up to 50 times stronger than heroin.

Fentanyl has played a key role in the nation's opioid crisis, which has claimed more than half a million lives from 2000 to 2005, and emerged as the leading cause of death for young Americans. Last year alone, the drug was linked to more than two-thirds of the nearly 110,000 overdose deaths in the U.S.

in China. But because fentanyl is a chemical drug that requires human-made substances, China has come to play a role in the nation's opioid crisis because it sells natural drugs used to create fentanyl in their independent forms, or "precursors" in the production of fentanyl.

So, while China is not selling fentanyl to Americans, Chinese vendors have still shipped the precursor chemicals directly to customers in the U.S. and to Mexican cartels for the production of the synthetic opioid.

"China remains the primary source of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances trafficked through international mail and express consignment operations environment, as well as the main source for all fentanyl-related substances trafficked into the United States," a 2019 intelligence report from Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) noted.

Monaco said Friday that the DOJ is alleging that the defendants named in the indictment "combined scientific know-how with deception, to circumvent customs barriers and ship precursors onto our shores and Mexico's."

Federal authorities also sent a warning to other fentanyl precursor producers, telling them: "There is more bad news coming."

"With every investigation, with every indictment, we are coming after you and we will not relent until this until this crisis ends," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said.

The U.S. has long devoted a diplomatic focus to urging China to tighten its regulations of precursor chemicals and to enforce those laws more diligently, but as China-U.S. relations have deteriorated, China has become unwilling to cooperate. Last year, China suspended all counternarcotics cooperation with the U.S.

Friday's indictments also come days after Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#)'s two-day visit to Beijing—the first trip to China by a U.S. secretary of state in five years.

The indictment alleges that the defendants knew they were breaking Chinese and U.S. law.

a public health emergency but a huge national security threat, Maitz said.

"I applaud the outstanding efforts of the DEA and the prosecutors for their dedicated work to expose this national security threat. As the former Special Agent in Charge of SOD, I'm proud of the exceptional efforts to help reduce the supply of this poison and save lives!"

Update 6/23/23, 3:08 p.m. ET: This story was updated to reflect that two of the eight have been arrested.
