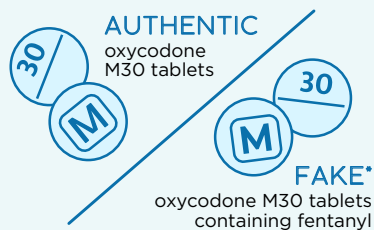


Know What's in Your Drugs

COUNTERFEIT PILLS



>>> [CLICK HERE](#) for real examples of authentic and fake pills.

WHAT are counterfeit pills?

Counterfeit pills are fake medications that have different ingredients than the actual medication. Even if a pill “looks” correct, if purchased illicitly, it still may be counterfeit.

Many fake pills are made to look like prescription opioids or stimulants and contain no legitimate medication.

Prescription pills purchased outside of a licensed pharmacy are illegal, dangerous, and potentially lethal. Nationally, evidence of counterfeit pill use in overdose deaths has more than doubled in recent years. These fake pills have been increasingly easy to purchase, with sales taking to the internet and social media. In 2023, **7 out of 10** DEA-tested fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills contained a **potentially lethal dose of fentanyl**.

*Source: [United States Drug Enforcement Administration](#); [CDC MMWR: Drug Overdose Deaths with Evidence of Counterfeit Pill Use](#)

7 OUT OF 10 CONTAINED FENTANYL*



Counterfeit pills in NORTH CAROLINA

In North Carolina, nearly **77,000** counterfeit pills were seized in 2021, **80%** of which contained some amount of fentanyl.

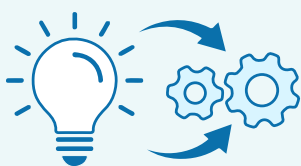
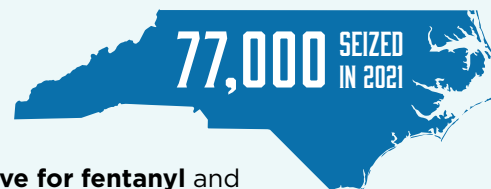
In a 2020-2022 study completed by the [North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner \(NC OCME\)](#), the postmortem toxicology results of a sample of 75 decedents were compared to the substances the investigation findings indicated that decedents thought they were taking.

Of the 75 decedents, investigation findings indicated that **38 (50.7%)** thought they were taking Xanax and **41 (54.7%)** thought they were taking a form of oxycodone*. Toxicology reports found **zero** reportable traces of either drug.

Toxicology findings were most often **positive for fentanyl** and designer benzodiazepines.

This study highlights real examples of overdose deaths involving counterfeit pills in North Carolina. Decedents were most often male (60%), under 40 years old (74.7%), and white (68%). **80%** of decedents in this study tested **positive for fentanyl** and 1 in 3 deaths had a direct witness testimony, indicating an opportunity for naloxone administration or other intervention.

Source: [NC High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas & NC OCME](#) *Total adds to more than 100% as many decedents had more than one substance in their system



STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE HARM REDUCTION and Prevent Counterfeit Pill Overdoses

1. Equip Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) with drug checking equipment such as fentanyl test strips and infrared spectrometry, and supply with educational handouts on how to correctly test pills, specifically.
2. Support drug checking, and educate individuals on the [Drug Testing Equipment Exception to Paraphernalia Law](#).
3. Fund SSPs to provide naloxone along side fentanyl test strips.
4. Promote the Never Use Alone hotline (1-800-484-3731), and educate individuals on the [Good Samaritan Law](#).
5. Expand SSP locations or other agencies providing harm reduction services to ensure there is a resource hub available in every county.
6. Encourage collaboration of public health, public safety, and harm reduction experts for surveillance and prevention of counterfeit pill-involved overdoses.

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) generates multiple resources to help keep our partners informed about overdose in North Carolina. **To see data and other resources, including information about NC's response efforts, please visit [NC DHHS Overdose Epidemic](#).**