



DEA Administrator Anne Milgram Remarks as Delivered Press Conference – December 16, 2021

On a Monday in May 2021, the parents of a 15-year old high school freshman found their son in his bedroom in Idaho. He wasn't breathing. And despite starting CPR right away and immediately calling for help, their son died from a fentanyl overdose. His death was caused by one pill that he purchased on Snapchat: a pill that he thought was a prescription oxycodone. It looked like a prescription oxycodone pill, but it was not. It was actually a fake pill containing a deadly dose of fentanyl.

This kind of tragedy, which shows that One Pill can Kill, is happening every single day, in countless communities, across the United States of America. DEA's investigations show that these tragic deaths are not accidents. We know these overdose deaths are directly caused by Mexican drug cartels that are flooding the United States with deadly fentanyl: Millions of fake pills, with ton quantities of fentanyl powder. The Mexican drug networks get chemicals largely from China, and then they mass produce, often in industrial labs, these deadly substances in Mexico. And then they pump this poison into the United States. And they are killing tens of thousands of Americans.

DEA has seized an unprecedented amount of fentanyl.... more than 15,000 pounds this year alone. That fentanyl is directly linked to the staggering amount of overdose deaths we are seeing in our country. Over the past year, 64,000 overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl. This is an existential threat to our communities, bringing harm and violence, and shattering families.

The amount of fentanyl the DEA and our law enforcement partners have seized this year is enough to kill every single American.

What is equally troubling is that the cartels have harnessed the perfect drug delivery tool: social media ... social media applications that are available on every smartphone in the United States. Eighty-five percent of all Americans have smartphones: that is about 280 million smartphones.

When you open those apps – when you open Snapchat, when you open Facebook, when you open Instagram, when you open TikTok, when you open YouTube, the drug traffickers and criminal networks are there waiting for you.



DEA worked with our state and local partners in Idaho to trace the Snapchat sale of the fake pill that killed the 15-year-old boy. We traced that pill back to the drug trafficker. That drug trafficker also led a criminal network who shot and killed a man just a few weeks after this overdose tragic death. Our investigation also revealed that this criminal network distributed hundreds of thousands of fake pills, using social media – primarily Snapchat – to push their drugs to unsuspecting Americans like the 15-year-old who lost his life. Another member of the same criminal network used Snapchat to try to sell guns so he could buy more fentanyl pills with the proceeds of the sale.

In the Idaho case, the DEA and our state and local partners seized over 50,000 counterfeit pills and 20 firearms, including three AR-15's, two AK-47's, one submachine gun, 10 pistols, and two shotguns. DEA has also determined that these drug traffickers are directly tied to Mexican criminal drug networks.

This investigation is an example of what we are seeing across the country.

As these criminal drug networks flood our Country with fentanyl, overdose deaths have skyrocketed. Last month, the CDC revealed that we have lost a staggering 100,000 lives to drug overdoses during the past year.

These are our family members, our friends, our neighbors, our colleagues, and our classmates Lives needlessly taken, one every five minutes.

The Mexican drug cartels don't care that they are killing a staggering number of Americans every day. They will just target and find new customers so that they can profit.

Criminal drug traffickers have found a new tool to pump poison into our communities.

They have turned our smartphones into a one-stop shop to market, to sell, and to deliver deadly drugs. Drug traffickers are using Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other mainstream social media apps.

They target people of all ages: A curious teenager ordering a pill online. A college student trying a pill from a friend. An elderly neighbor searching online for a painkiller.

Drug cartels have chosen to use social media to expand their business for several reasons: it's widely accessible, it's easy to use, drug traffickers can hide their identities,



they can lie about what they are selling, and most importantly, the sites permit the sale of counterfeit pills every day to go unchecked.

These criminal drug networks are misrepresenting what they're selling. People think that they are buying real Xanax pills, real Adderall pills, real Oxycodone pills, using online platforms they trust, when in fact they are getting fentanyl, in pills that look just like the real thing.

This is why DEA took the unusual step of issuing a Public Safety Alert for the first time in over six years. We know that criminal drug networks in Mexico are mass-producing fentanyl, using chemicals sourced largely from China, and pressing it into fake prescription pills, and pushing them as legitimate pills to unsuspecting Americans. With a simple click – as easy as ordering pizza online – Americans are buying what they think are real medicines. What they are getting is fake pills laced with deadly fentanyl; fake pills that are killing Americans and leading to an untold number of overdoses.

Criminal drug networks are now front and center on social media, with us whenever our smart phones are. Known emojis and code words are being widely used as signals online, in the online buying and selling of deadly drugs like fentanyl and fentanyl-laced fake pills. That means that these deadly drugs are reaching our communities faster, easier, and cheaper than ever before. They are just one click away.

This past Tuesday, just two days ago, DEA completed a public safety surge – our second once since August – to target the most dangerous drug traffickers and drug trafficking networks that are pushing deadly drugs into our country.

Our investigations revealed that these networks are directly linked to 39 overdose deaths. And 76 of our investigations involve criminal drug activity on Facebook and Facebook Messenger, on Snapchat, on Instagram, on TikTok, on YouTube, and other social media platforms. Thirty-two of our investigations are directly tied to Mexican drug cartels that are mass-producing and distributing the fentanyl that is killing Americans.

In total, Between September 29 and December 14 of this year, DEA seized over 8.4 million fake pills, over 5,400 pounds of methamphetamine, and hundreds of pounds each of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, often in the same places that we seized fentanyl. During this surge, DEA has arrested 776 people and seized 288 firearms connected to these drug seizures.



This record amount of counterfeit pills containing fentanyl seized by DEA is chilling. Just two days ago, DEA agents in Arizona seized approximately 1.7 million pills and 13 pounds of fentanyl in a single operation. I am confident that DEA agents and task force officers prevented a significant number of overdoses and overdose deaths with just that seizure alone.

DEA has seized year to date, more than 20 million deadly fake pills and over 15,000 pounds of fentanyl powder. Our laboratory analysis in 2021 has shown that today, four out of every ten fake pills with fentanyl contain a potentially lethal dose.

One thing is clear: today, criminal drug networks are killing Americans and they are using social media to deliver their deadly doses of fentanyl. These networks are preying on Americans for profit, and they are fueling an unprecedented overdose epidemic.

DEA will stop at nothing to combat this threat to our country. This is what the DEA does – we take down the criminal networks and the drug traffickers who are producing fentanyl in Mexico, who are flooding it into the United States, and are killing people across our Nation.

DEA urges the public to be a part of the solution. Know the dangers and the accessibility of deadly drugs online. Never take medicine that wasn't prescribed personally to you and filled by a licensed pharmacist. Spread the word that One Pill Can Kill. Talk to your family and friends about the danger of buying drugs online.

And know that the DEA remains relentless in our commitment to take down the criminal drug networks that threaten the health and safety of our communities.

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