**ILLEGAL ONLINE PHARMACIES AND THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC:**

**GENERAL FACT SHEET**

**ILLEGAL ONLINE PHARMACIES**

At any given time, there are 30,000-50,000 online pharmacies; of those, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that up to 97% are illegal and unsafe, meaning they don’t comply with U.S. laws and pharmacy standards

It is illegal for any pharmacy to sell opioids of any kind online; further, buying any prescription medications from an illegal online pharmacy can result in purchasing counterfeit drugs, and/or identity theft.

In order to avoid purchasing from an illegal pharmacy website, all consumers should use CSIP’s [VerifyBeforeYouBuy.org](http://www.verifybeforeyoubuy.org) tool to ensure they are buying genuine FDA-approved medications.

**THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC**

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 2 million people in the U.S. are addicted to opiates. The director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Dr. James Redfield, who almost lost his son to an overdose of cocaine tainted with fentanyl, recently announced he is making the opioid epidemic one of his top priorities.

Among people who misused prescription pain relievers in 2013 and 2014, about half said that they obtained those pain relievers from a friend or relative, while only 22% said they received the drugs from their doctor. The rest either stole or bought pills from someone they knew, bought from a dealer or obtained multiple prescriptions from multiple doctors. Most people who abuse or become addicted to opioid pain relievers are not the unwitting pain patients to whom they were prescribed.

While the volume of prescriptions has trended down since 2011, total opioid-related deaths have risen. The drivers for the past few years are **heroin and fentanyl**, a synthetic opioid that is 30 to 50 times more powerful than heroin, and some of its variations are stronger still.

Fentanyl is often now laced into heroin or other drugs, without the user’s knowledge. Even those who seek out fentanyl may not be able to survive its unexpected strength, especially if they are relapsing after period of abstinence, and have lost their tolerance to opioids.

**2016 STATISTICS AND FACTS**

There were an estimated **64,000 opioid-related deaths in the United States**, which far surpasses peak numbers in gun homicides, fatal car accidents, and deaths due to HIV/AIDS.

The CDC estimated **we were losing 115 people to opioid-related overdoses every day – or one person every 12 minutes.**

Fentanyl and heroin - which itself is often tainted to some extent with the fentanyl - together were present in more than two-thirds of all opioid-related deaths. Painkillers were present in a little more than one-third of opioid-related deaths, but a third of those painkiller deaths also included heroin or fentanyl.

In addition, opioid-related overdose deaths from synthetic opioids like fentanyl surpassed prescription opioids as the most common drug involved in overdose deaths in the U.S. for the first time in 2016.

**2017 STATISTICS AND FACTS**

According to the [CDC’s provisional data](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm), for the 12 month period ending November 30, 2017, **200 Americans are now dying each day from drug overdoses,** the first time the numbers have breached that benchmark. About **136 of the 200 or 68% are dying from opioid-related overdoses.**

The agency’s provisional data show that **72,855 people likely died of drug overdose** — a rise of 13.2 percent over the previous 12-month period, ending November 30, 2016. The agency reports that **49,466 of those deaths involved at least one opioid**.

The most commonly detected drugs in fatal overdose victims during this period were synthetic opioids—mainly illicit fentanyl and its chemical variations—**which were found in 40 percent of all overdose victims and in 59 percent of all opioid-related deaths.**

At least another **15,279 deaths during this period**—21 percent of all drug deaths and 31 percent of all opioid fatalities—**involved** **common prescription drugs**, like hydrocodone and oxycodone.

**ADDICTION TREATMENT**

A range of treatments including medicines and behavioral therapies are effective in helping people with opioid addiction.

Two medicines, **buprenorphine and methadone**, work by binding to the same opioid receptors in the brain as the opioid medicines, reducing cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Another medicine, naltrexone, blocks opioid receptors and prevents opioid drugs from having an effect.

Behavioral therapies for addiction to prescription opioids help people modify their attitudes and behaviors related to drug use, increase healthy life skills, and persist with other forms of treatment, such as medication.

Some examples include cognitive behavioral therapy which helps modify the patient's drug use expectations and behaviors, and also effectively manage triggers and stress.

Multidimensional family therapy, developed for adolescents with drug use problems, addresses a range of personal and family influences on one's drug use patterns and is designed to improve overall functioning. These behavioral treatment approaches have proven effective, especially when used along with medicines.

**OVERDOSES AND NALOXONE**

**Naloxone** is a medicine that can treat an opioid overdose when given right away. It works by rapidly binding to opioid receptors and blocking the effects of opioid drugs.

Naloxone is available as an injectable (needle) solution, a hand-held auto-injector (EVZIO®), and a nasal spray (NARCAN® Nasal Spray).

Some states have passed laws that allow pharmacists to dispense naloxone without a personal prescription. This allows friends, family, and others in the community to use the auto-injector and nasal spray versions of naloxone to save someone who is overdosing.

And the U.S. Surgeon General issued this statement:

*For patients currently taking high doses of opioids as prescribed for pain, individuals misusing prescription opioids, individuals using illicit opioids such as heroin or fentanyl, health care practitioners, family and friends of people who have an opioid use disorder, and community members who come into contact with people at risk for opioid overdose, knowing how to use naloxone and keeping it within reach can save a life.*

**FENTANYL STRIPS**

Low-price test strips that accurately detect fentanyl in street drugs could potentially help opioid abusers avoid fatal overdoses.

Results from a Johns Hopkins study released in March found that 70 percent of the 355 users interviewed for the study said that if they knew a substance contained fentanyl, they would either not consume it at all, would use it more slowly or would use it in the company of someone who has naloxone—an overdose-reversal medication that can be injected or sprayed through the nostrils.