



Communities in Ruin:

The Human Cost of
Fentanyl in Colorado

APRIL 2025

INTRODUCTION

In about a decade, the opioid epidemic – led by fentanyl – ravaged through Colorado. Its deadly impact continues today, unabated by state law or the politicians in charge. According to the [DEA](#), fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. Roughly [two](#) milligrams of the opioid – which is only a few grains of salt – is deadly for most people. Law enforcement reports that every other type of drug in Colorado, including marijuana, is now laced with fentanyl.

Fentanyl-related deaths have torn apart and brought untold pain to families across the state. Inner cities, suburban areas, and rural communities – no corner of Colorado is exempt. In 2019, lawmakers passed a [bill](#) that made possession of up to four grams of fentanyl (and other hardcore drugs) only a misdemeanor. According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, there were [222](#) fentanyl related deaths in 2019. Four years later, in 2023, over [1,200](#) drug overdose deaths were attributed to fentanyl – an increase of over 440% in that time period, since state law lowered penalties.

In 2022, lawmakers [attempted](#) to change course and tighten penalties on fentanyl, but it simply hasn't been enough. People may still possess up to a gram of fentanyl and only receive a misdemeanor charge. There is no mandatory jail time for most dealers, and treatment for users stuck in a deadly cycle is not required.

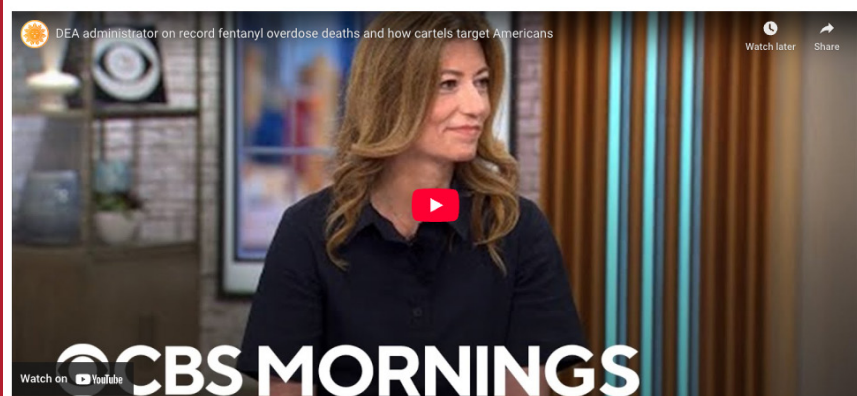
This report sheds light on the human cost of fentanyl in Colorado and what we risk by leaving ineffective state laws in place.

“[Fentanyl] is responsible for nearly 70% of the United States’ 107,000+ drug overdose deaths.”

Source: Get Smart About Drugs

DEA Administrator on Record Fentanyl Overdose Deaths

For Americans age 18-45, the leading cause of death is fentanyl overdose. The addictive drug is responsible for nearly 70% of the United States’ 107,000+ drug overdose deaths in the past year and is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. DEA Administrator Anne Milgram addresses its origin, appearance and composition, and distribution in the United States.



REAL STORIES OF FENTANYL'S DEVASTATING EFFECTS ON COLORADO FAMILIES

“For Americans age 18-45, the leading cause of death is fentanyl overdose.”

Source: Get Smart About Drugs



“The fentanyl problem in Colorado is out of control.”

*Congressman Gabe Evans,
Representing Colorado's 8th
Congressional District*

*Source: Devastated: Colorado's
Fentanyl Disaster*



Source: *Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster*

"In June of 2020, I lost my 14-year old son Alexander to fentanyl poisoning. He wanted to go hang out with his friends and the following morning, I went to wake him for his orthodontist appointment, and it was too late. That's the day we learned about fentanyl."

- Amy Neville, Mother of Alexander Neville

"I had never heard of fentanyl before until Ashley died. The day of her service, I see a picture of these two little blue pills. I'd never seen them before. To me, they looked like two pills that were, you know, prescribed medications. I didn't know."

- Andrea Thomas, Mother of Ashley Romero



Source: *Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster*



Source: *Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster*

"I lost my boys. I won't get them back. I had no idea of what this drug was. And since then, I've just been drinking through a firehose, learning about this terrible drug that's created this epidemic in America."

- Matt Riviere, Father of Andrew & Stephen Riviere





Source: *Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster*

Jaydynn Potter was sixteen years old when her sister graduated from high school, just three weeks before her seventeenth birthday. Jaydynn volunteered to drive her sister and friends to other graduation parties around town. That night, when Jaydynn was going to bed at her friend's house, she was given, at least what she was told, half of a Percocet because of how sick and tired she was feeling. The following morning, Katie Potter, Jaydynn's mother, tried to get ahold of her daughter but couldn't reach her. Katie said that "Jaydynn was absolutely murdered. Accidental fentanyl intoxication poisoning is not an overdose. She was a 16-year-old girl who was murdered by poison."

- Katie Potter, Mother of Jaydynn Potter

Devin Carney was born with a multitude of illnesses and had almost 80 procedures and surgeries before he turned 18. When Devin aged out of his medical care at age 19, he turned to the streets to receive pain medication. Devin's mother, Angela Carney, says, "Devin was murdered by fentanyl in 2021." Upon receiving a cryptic text from one of Devin's friends, Angela dropped everything and ran to find her son. She found Devin in his bedroom, lying on the floor with his lips blue. He died of a fentanyl overdose.

- Angela Carney, Mother of Devin Carney



Source: *Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster*

Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster premiered all across Colorado in May 2024 and is now available for free at [DevastatedCO.com](https://www.DevastatedCO.com). The documentary highlights the alarming rise in fentanyl-related deaths in Colorado and the destructive effects of the opioid epidemic on families, communities, and the state. The documentary brings in heartbroken parents, recovering addicts, former drug dealers, law enforcement, DAs, and lawmakers to provide personal accounts that thoroughly showcase the devastating effects of fentanyl in Colorado.



Source: *Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster*

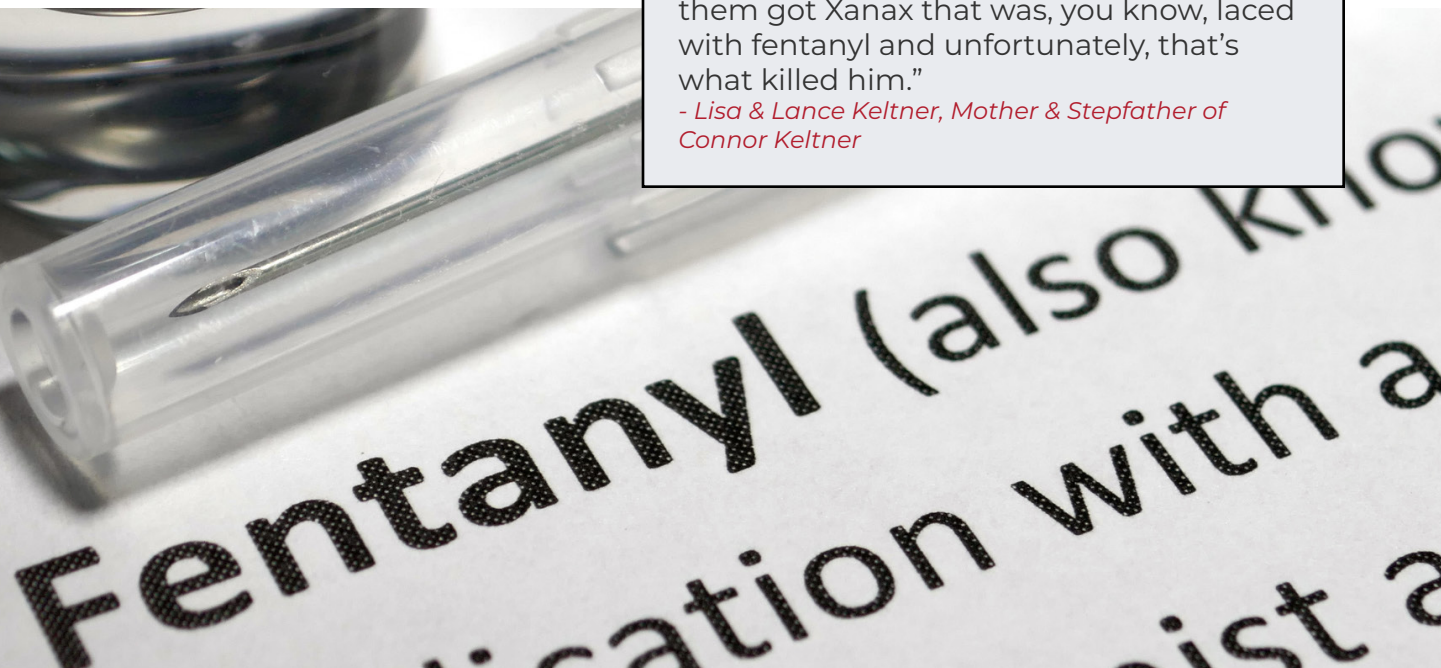
Lisa: "Connor was born in December of 1997 in Austin Texas."

Lane: "He was outgoing, had a lot of friends."

Lisa: "He thought deeply and I think, like me, I think he overthought a lot of things, and I think that he fell into a depression with the parents' divorce and all of that because he was around 12 when that happened."

Lance: "So his friends, you know he and his friends did take Xanax recreationally, so you know it was just a matter of time before he or one of his friends or all of them got Xanax that was, you know, laced with fentanyl and unfortunately, that's what killed him."

- Lisa & Lance Keltner, Mother & Stepfather of Connor Keltner



"According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment there were 222 fentanyl related deaths in 2019, 540 in 2020, 912 in 2021, and 920 in 2022."

Source: *Common Sense Institute*



Source: Colorado State University

“We didn’t realize where he had been at the time. He returned home, and he seemed to be fine. We were relieved to see him home safely. Three hours later, we realized he had stopped breathing and started CPR. Paramedics came but were unable to revive him. So we spent Father’s Day grieving instead of celebrating with our family.”

Aidan Ridley, Father of Raleigh Paulson

Aidan Ridley testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing about how his 22-year-old son died of an accidental fentanyl overdose on Father’s Day 2024. His son left for Civic Center Park at 3 AM and then returned home at 7 AM.

Ridley told the committee his son had struggled with substance abuse since high school and had been resistant to treatment.

Ridley: “Had Raleigh been arrested for possession of a small amount of fentanyl on Father’s Day, he might still be alive today. Six months in prison might have given him the opportunity to change directions, in a way that he seemed unwilling to do on his own initiative.”

Ridley mentioned that Raleigh was his wife’s only child and was the center of their lives for 22 years.

Ridley: “We’re devastated by the loss of our son Raleigh, a talented and much-loved young man with a bright future... and the pain of our loss is present every day.”

Source: Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing February 10, 2025, Colorado State

"Hannah Elise was not an addict. Hannah was beautiful, smart, caring, and very loving. Hannah made a positive impact on most she met. She also had quite a spark in her. She told things as it was, whether it was good or bad. Hannah's high school counselor called her 'tenacious.'"

"Hannah's two friends have overcome drug use... They both have done this in the name of Hannah. I would support my child having a felony for one pound rather than bury her."

Source: Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing February 10, 2025

"Hannah was a light in this world. She didn't want to die. One pill, a fake Xanax, was all it took. December 7th of '21 was the last time Hannah told me 'Good morning, beautiful. I love you so very much.' A few short hours later, I found her passed away in her bedroom."

Mother of Hannah Elise



"After learning of the arrest, Grace's mother, Tricia Otto, said, 'This will not bring my son back. There are no winners in this case.' She went on to say, 'The only winners are the people outside this case whose lives are saved and the families who are spared the torment of losing a loved one to fentanyl poisoning.'"

At the time that investigators say [Raffiel] Walker was dealing fentanyl to Grace in 2023, a CBS News Colorado investigation showed Walker was on the run from charges in the state of Arkansas. He was wanted for allegedly violating his probation in Arkansas in a 2017 murder case. He had twice been arrested and jailed in Denver since 2021, and both times, Denver authorities had to release him from custody because authorities in Arkansas refused to have Walker extradited back to their state. As a result, he remained free in Denver to allegedly deal drugs. Otto called what happened 'an absolute failure of our system,' expressing disbelief that Arkansas authorities would not retrieve a man wanted on serious charges."

Source: CBS News

Source: CBS News

"For 29.5 years, I had the privilege of being Calvin's mom. He died of fentanyl poisoning on April 30th, 2023. He had struggled with substance use disorder for 14 years. At the time he died, he was eight months sober, working full-time, and going to the gym on a daily basis... The pain of his absence is unbearable."

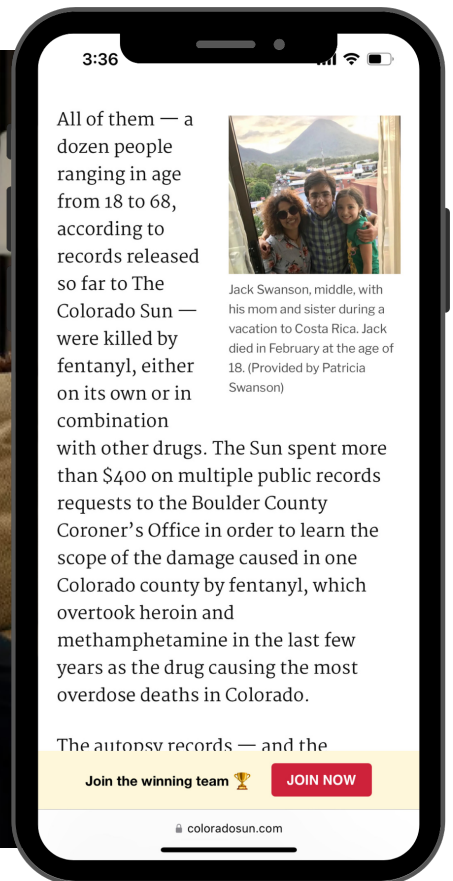
"If this bill had been in place back then, he would have been in jail, and my son would be alive."

"He knows that as long as he only maintains less than 4 grams on him at a time, he is only faced with a misdemeanor charge. And he's been taught by our judicial system that the most he will probably ever face is probation and a possible suspended sentence that will never be imposed."

Source: Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing February 10, 2025



Source: [The Colorado Sun](#)



Fentanyl, in the form of counterfeit drugs, ravaged the county of Boulder in 2021.

“Jack Swanson, 18, died in February while listening to music in his bed. Next to him were little blue pills and rectangular-shaped white ones, the kind sold in his hometown of Boulder and throughout Colorado as ‘mexis’ and ‘xanny bars.’

Two in five of the counterfeit pills circulating the country, drugs made in Mexico to look like oxycodone and Xanax tablets, contain enough fentanyl to kill a person instantly.”

“Jack’s death, which shocked Boulder teenagers and sent parents into a panic, marked the beginning of a string of fentanyl overdoses in the county that have yet to relent. Two 18-year-olds died less than three days apart. Two young men, including a University of Colorado student, died separately on the same day in June. A second CU student died in August three days before the start of his senior year.

All of them — a dozen people ranging in age from 18 to 68, according to records released so far to The Colorado Sun — were killed by fentanyl, either on its own or in combination with other drugs.”

“Carrie and Ryan Panning will never know whether their oldest son, a soon-to-be senior at CU Boulder, knew the risk he was taking when he took drugs while living off campus and taking summer classes toward his computer science degree.

Ross Panning, 20, had a 3.8 cumulative GPA and was looking forward to his senior year capstone project. After graduating, he had dreams of coding for a small tech company on the West Coast. And when he wasn't studying, he enjoyed scouring the racks of resale shops looking for vintage clothing or Nintendo DS video games to add to the collection in his bedroom in his family's home.

But on June 14, likely within seconds of taking the drugs, Ross Panning died in his bed. Investigators found small baggies with a white powdery substance inside. An autopsy report said he died from a mix of drugs, including fentanyl."

Source: The Colorado Sun

"In 2023, there were over 1,200 drug overdose deaths from fentanyl, 59% of which resulted from illegally manufactured fentanyl. This is approximately three deaths per day on average. This is more than the number of people killed in homicides in Colorado in 2021, 2022, and 2023 combined (1,146)."

Source: Common Sense Institute, CDC

LOCAL NEWS

5 found dead inside Commerce City apartment identified

It's believed that all five died from overdoses after ingesting a drug they did not know was laced with fentanyl, according to the DA's office.

In February 20, 2022, five people were found dead in an apartment from ingesting a drug, possibly cocaine, they did not know was laced with a heavy dose of fentanyl.

One of the five was a mom who was survived by her 4-month old baby, who was found inside in a crib in the apartment, unharmed.

This story was the first story highlighted by the documentary Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster. The documentary reported that the original 911 caller died from an overdose eight months later.

[Source: 9News, Devastated](#)

“The vast majority of fake pills coming into Colorado are made by Mexican drug cartels to look like Oxycodone pills, or ‘blues’ – counterfeit ‘M30s’ – with an ‘M’ stamped on one side, ‘30’ for milligrams on the other.”

[Source: Drug Enforcement Agency](#)

FENTANYL DEATHS ON THE RISE

 **IN COLORADO, FENTANYL DEATHS INCREASED BY MORE THAN 1000% BETWEEN 2015 AND 2021. THERE WERE 1,578 DEATHS DURING THAT PERIOD.**

Source: 17th Judicial District Attorney's Office



Source: Drug Enforcement Agency

A lethal dose of fentanyl



“Why is Fentanyl being added to street drugs?”

“Fentanyl is much cheaper to make than other opioids. It is also easier to smuggle because small amounts are very powerful. It is a lot easier to smuggle in a baggie of Fentanyl powder than kilogram bricks of other drugs for the same profit margin. In addition, it is highly addictive making individuals wanting/ needing to buy more as they chase their first high.”

Source: 17th Judicial District Attorney's Office

Figure 4. Fentanyl-Related Deaths Drove the Increase in Opioid Analgesic Overdoses in 2020

Overdose deaths by drug type, 2000-2020

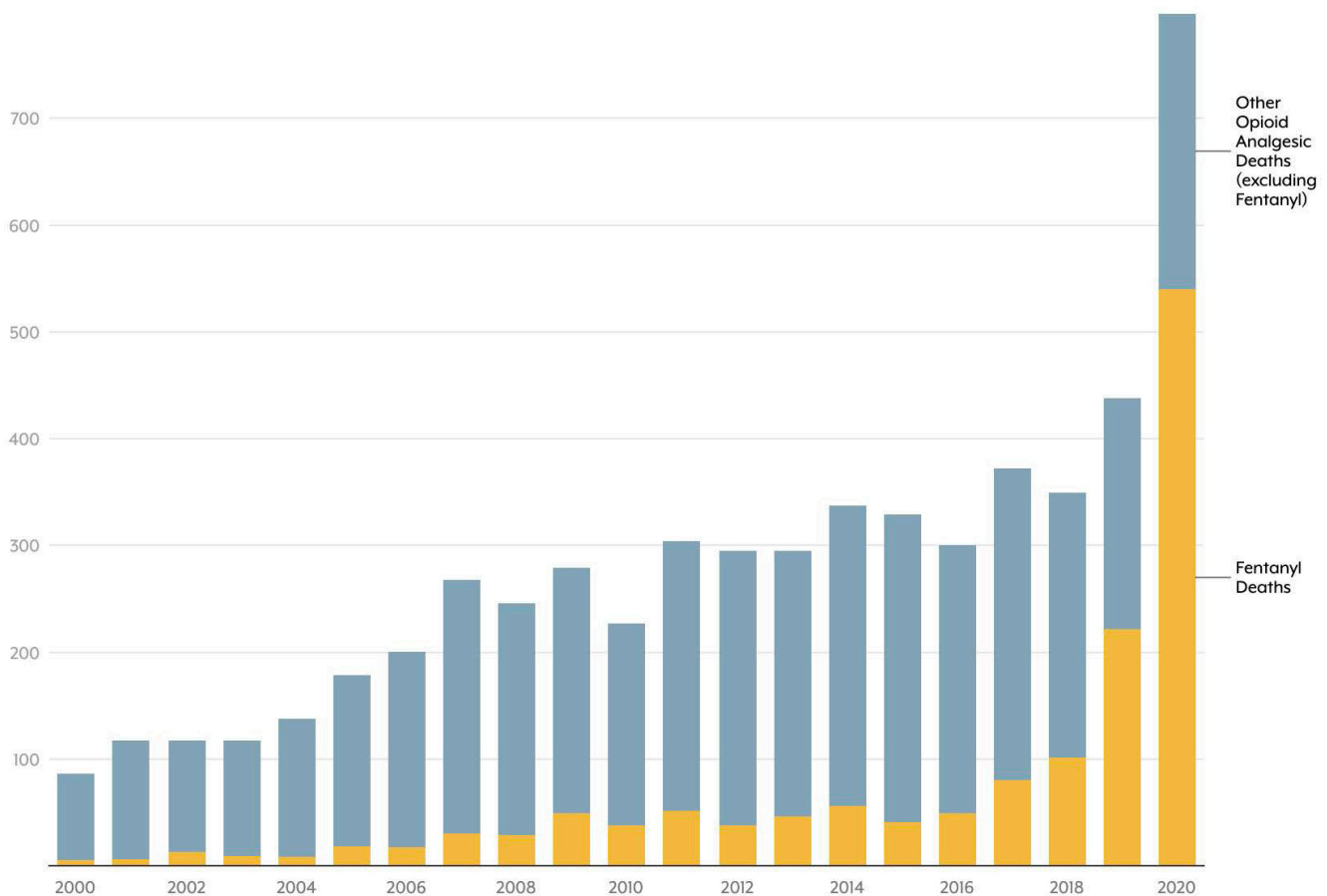


Chart: Colorado Health Institute • Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

“In 2020, overdoses involving fentanyl made up about 68% of all opioid analgesic deaths. Between 2019 and 2020, the number of overdose deaths involving fentanyl more than doubled, from 222 to 540. There were 10 times as many overdoses involving fentanyl in 2020 as in 2016 (Figure 4).” Note that state law changed in 2019, lowering penalties for fentanyl.

Source: Colorado Health Institute

A Parallel Epidemic: More Overdose Deaths in 2020, Fentanyl Fatalities Spike

“Opioid overdoses rose by 54% in 2020, accounting for nearly two in three overdose deaths in Colorado.”

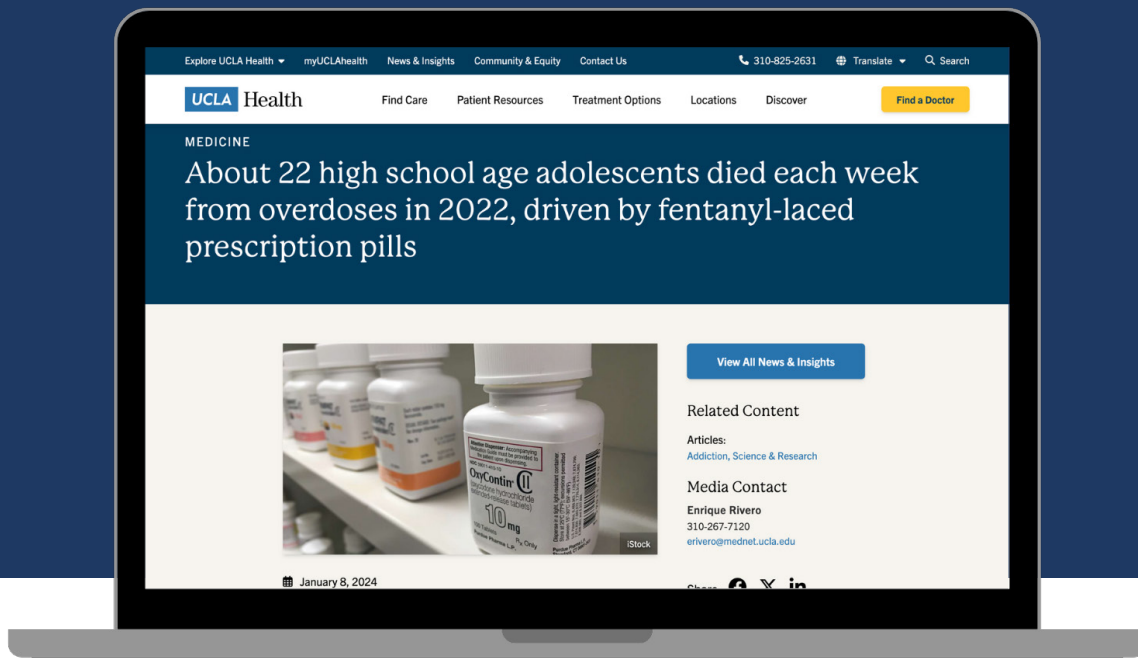
“Fentanyl overdoses became more common, more than doubling between 2019 and 2020 and increasing by 10 times since 2016.”

Source: Colorado Health Institute

“The total cost of fentanyl-related overdose deaths in Colorado is estimated to be \$16 billion in 2023. This is over ten times the cost of fentanyl overdose from 2017, \$1.3 billion.”

Source: Common Sense Institute

FENTANYL'S THREAT TO OUR CHILDREN



“When Aviyana Montoya died in 2022, the toddler had ingested so much fentanyl a prosecutor said it was ‘10 times the amount’ that would kill an adult. She was ‘cold to the touch’ when adults found her unresponsive in her bedroom, and when paramedics arrived, they said ‘signs of rigor mortis’ had already taken effect.

The little girl, who was approaching her second birthday, had been living in a home that had been used for a drug-dealing operation, according to prosecutors who handled the criminal case against her parents. A death investigation conducted by the state’s Child Fatality Review Team indicated, ‘the parents... had been selling fentanyl to pay for their cocaine.’”

Source: Scripps News

A recent investigation by Denver7 and Scripps News found that there were significant communication gaps between law enforcement and child welfare services when dealing with two Colorado children who ended up dying from being exposed to fentanyl. The investigation revealed that the “children’s parents both had drug-related run-ins with police with their child present before each child died. The police, in each case, never alerted child welfare workers that the children might be in danger.”

Source: Denver7



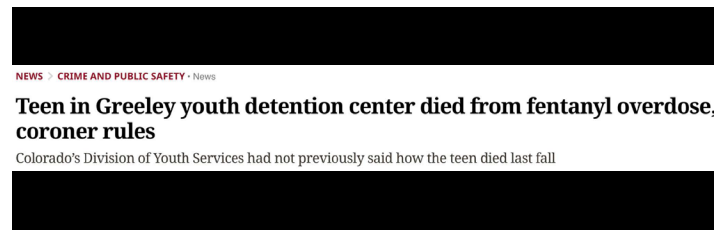


"A Northern Colorado man has been sentenced to 25 years in prison for his role in supplying fentanyl to a teenage boy. Samuel Strait was sentenced Tuesday afternoon by 8th Judicial District Judge Daniel McDonald.

Strait, 32, was prosecuted and convicted for his role in the 2022 overdose death of the teenager."

"Investigators with the Northern Colorado Drug Task Force said the boy contacted Strait multiple times seeking access to fentanyl pills. The boy, who had a history of addiction, was labeled as 'Black boy' in Strait's contacts. Police say that proved he knew the boy was a juvenile."

Source: CBS News



"The 16-year-old being held in a Greeley youth detention center who suffered a medical emergency in October died from complications of acute fentanyl toxicity, the Weld County coroner ruled."

"Internal state incident reports reviewed by The Denver Post show an unnamed party reported to facility leadership shortly after the incident that [a] staffer allegedly provided 'percs' — a street name for Percocet, a highly addictive opioid-based painkiller — to the teen the night before he overdosed.

At least seven young people in Colorado youth detention centers were hospitalized following overdose-related emergency calls last year, including three teens who required life-saving naloxone at a Colorado Springs facility on the same day over the summer, The Post reported in November."

Source: The Denver Post



Source: CBS News



Kim Osterman: “The dealer that sold my son fentanyl via SnapChat had a long, long history of drug charges and arrests, including a juvenile record. My son purchased the drug that took his life in the King Sooper’s parking lot in Broomfield, Colorado, from a 23-year-old drug dealer who had just purchased a shiny Corvette from his very lucrative drug dealing business... If the drug dealer had been charged with a felony, with all of his previous convictions of drug deals, maybe my son would still be here today. Charging drug dealers who sell this poison with a felony will save lives. It could be your child next.”

Cole Osterman: “My brother Max was a smart, funny, athletic, ambitious, and talented young man. He always strived for greatness and never settled for less. On February 3rd, 2021, Max died of a fentanyl overdose at 18 years old. My brother, my best friend, my flesh and blood, was taken from my life and my family’s

lives in the blink of an eye. The dealer that sold the substance to Max was dealing drugs in Broomfield, Westminster, Thornton, and quite possibly more areas. The dealer had a rap sheet and multiple drug charges. While on probation, the dealer was continuing to sell illegal substances such as fentanyl to my brother and other individuals. He would get arrested for dealing drugs while on probation, and his punishment was more probation... In a better world, he would have been charged with a felony on his first arrest. With him convicted, it could have possibly saved the lives of four people, my brother included.”

David Osterman: “I’m a father to a dead son and part of a shattered family... I don’t know if this bill is going to fix everything, but I do know we need to do something... Doing nothing is just irresponsible.”

Source: Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing February 10, 2025



CBS EVENING NEWS

Overdose deaths surge as fentanyl floods Colorado

CBS
Evening
NewsBy Jeff Pegues
September 21, 2022 / 7:05 PM EDT / CBS News

"Adding to the urgency, police say the cartels are making fentanyl look like candy, making it more enticing to young people.

Kim Osterman's 18-year-old son, Max, died from fentanyl poisoning last year.

'They're deliberately doing this to kill the children,' she said. 'They're marketing it to the children.' It's a supply chain police are trying to choke off, but shows little sign of shutting down."

Source: CBS News



"After a nearly three-year cycle of hope lost and regained, Kim Osterman finally found her peace.

Thursday, at his sentencing hearing, she told her son's drug dealer what he stole from her.

'The community will be safer with Sergio Guerra-Carrillo finally behind bars and hopefully unable to take another life,' Osterman said. 'I hope he considers turning his life around because he still has time to live, to start a family, to give his mother grandchildren. All the things Max never had a chance to do.'

Source: The Denver Gazette

MAJOR FENTANYL BUSTS & UNCOVERING NEW DEADLY MIXTURES

"Fentanyl is now the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45. In calendar year 2023, DEA seized nationally more than 77 million fentanyl pills and nearly 12,000 pounds of fentanyl powder. This is the most fentanyl seized by DEA in a single year and amounts to more than 386 million deadly doses of fentanyl prevented from reaching consumers – enough to kill every American.

Fentanyl remains the deadliest drug threat facing this country. The fentanyl pills we see today are deadlier than ever: DEA laboratory testing in 2023 revealed seven out of 10 pills tested contain a potentially deadly dose of fentanyl. This is an increase from four in 10 pills in 2021 and six in 10 pills in 2022. A potentially deadly dose is considered just two milligrams of fentanyl, which is approximately the amount that fits on the tip of a pencil."

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency



Colorado Breaks Record For Fentanyl Pill Seizures

December 03, 2024 | [Share Article](#) | [Download Press Release](#)

"DENVER – The Drug Enforcement Administration's Rocky Mountain Field Division (RMFD) announces it has seized nearly 2.7 million fentanyl pills – or 'fake' pills – in Colorado, with one month remaining in the year.

This breaks last year's record-setting 2.61 million pills seized in the state.



'It is an unfortunate record to set,' said DEA RMFD Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Pullen. '...While we have seen seizure numbers trending lower in other parts of the country, **Colorado seems to be consistently at or near record highs for the number of fake pills seized.**'

DEA lab testing reveals **five out of every ten pills analyzed contain a likely fatal dose of fentanyl for a first-time user...**

'...There's still a 50-50 chance you'll die after taking just one of these pills. It's a flip of a coin,' Pullen added."

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency

"The Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco Cartel in Mexico, using chemicals largely sourced from China, are primarily responsible for the vast majority of the fentanyl that is being trafficked in communities across the United States."

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency



“Why would drug dealers add Fentanyl to drugs if it can kill people?”

“Because Fentanyl is cheap and so highly addictive, it creates a much greater profit margin. The occasional loss of one or two users are not detrimental to their bottom line because they know that another addict can be easily created.”

“People can also develop a tolerance for Opioids like Fentanyl requiring them to use more and more to get high. This causes drug dealers and cartels to make stronger pills with more Fentanyl. **However, these stronger pills may kill newer users who have not developed such a tolerance. In addition, some dealers intentionally add deadly amounts to some pills because the death of a user is like an advertisement that that dealer has really strong drugs.**”

“Finally, these drugs are being mixed and cooked in open air ‘labs’ in rural parts of China and Mexico. These labs are not being run by individuals with an interest in quality control and scientific measures. They use large vats over inconsistent heating elements.”

Source: 17th Judicial District Attorney's Office



“Adding to DEA concerns is the recent appearance of carfentanil in Colorado. Last month, a seizure of 250,000+ pills was determined to contain carfentanil – an animal tranquilizer – used to sedate or put down animals the size of elephants and rhinoceroses.”

“Carfentanil is one hundred times more potent than fentanyl.”

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency



Suspicious Travel Leads To DEA Seizure Of 670,000 Fake Pills In Colorado & New Mexico

November 25, 2024 | [Share Article](#) | [Download Press Release](#)

For Immediate Release

Contact: Steffan W. Tubbs

Phone Number: 571-387-5079

COLORADO SPRINGS – An incoming tip based on the premise of “see something, say something” leads to the seizure of approximately 670,000 fentanyl pills in Colorado and New Mexico.

Earlier this month, a tip out of Albuquerque led to the arrest of a man in Colorado Springs, suspected of transporting approximately 340,000 fentanyl pills. The tip also led to the seizure of approximately 330,000 fentanyl pills at an Albuquerque transportation hub.

“The number of fentanyl pills seized in this case is almost enough to give every resident in the city of Denver one fake pill,” said DEA Rocky Mountain Field Division Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Pullen.

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency

PUBLIC SAFETY ALERT

DEA Reports Widespread Threat of Fentanyl Mixed with Xylazine

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is warning the American public of a sharp increase in the trafficking of fentanyl mixed with xylazine. Xylazine, also known as “Tranq,” is a powerful sedative that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved for veterinary use.

“Xylazine is making the deadliest drug threat our country has ever faced, fentanyl, even deadlier,” said Administrator Milgram. “DEA has seized xylazine and fentanyl mixtures in 48 of 50 States. The DEA Laboratory System is reporting that in 2022 approximately 23% of fentanyl powder and 7% of fentanyl pills seized by the DEA contained xylazine.”

“Xylazine and fentanyl drug mixtures place users at a higher risk of suffering a fatal drug poisoning. Because xylazine is not an opioid, naloxone (Narcan) does not reverse its effects.”

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency



The Growing Threat of Xylazine and its Mixture with Illicit Drugs

DEA Joint Intelligence Report
OCTOBER 2022

Xylazine, reported as an adulterant in an increasing number of illicit drug mixtures, has also been detected in a growing number of overdose deaths. It is commonly encountered in combination with fentanyl but has also been detected in mixtures containing cocaine, heroin, and a variety of other drugs. However, xylazine is most frequently reported in combinations with two or more substances present. In addition to its presence in drug combinations, xylazine (often known as "tranq") is used on its own, though this is less frequently reported. Limited scientific research has been conducted on the effects of xylazine on the human body, but anecdotal reports indicate that users experience effects similar to opioids. Xylazine can lead to depression of the central nervous system along with other adverse effects, as reported in scientific and medical journals. The presence of xylazine in illicit drug combinations and its detection in fatal overdoses may be more widespread than reported as a number of jurisdictions across the country may not include xylazine in forensic laboratory or toxicology testing.

Source: Drug Enforcement Agency

LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS RESPOND TO THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC



*“Fentanyl remains the single biggest public safety issue facing our state. While steps were taken at the state Capitol [in 2022] to try and address the situation, those steps did not go nearly far enough. We have all seen and been angered at the headlines telling of fentanyl’s deadly toll among our young people. And it is not only those addicted to this poison who are falling victim to it. Increasingly, the deaths are coming to those who take what they consider less dangerous illicit drugs which happen to be laced with fentanyl. **Now, more than ever, taking any drug is akin to playing Russian Roulette.**”*

John Kellner
Former District Attorney



The fentanyl problem is “staggering, and it’s not slowing down.”

*David Olesky, Special Agent in Charge of DEA’s Denver Division
Source: 9News*



Pueblo County Sheriff's Office

David J. Lucero Sheriff
Steve Bryant Undersheriff

Mark A. Mears
Bureau Chief
Law Enforcement

Paul J. Toth
Bureau Chief
Detention

News Release

For Immediate Release
Contact: Gayle Perez 719 924 5471

Date: July 24, 2024

Deputy Recovering After Exposure to Fentanyl

“Pueblo, CO: A Pueblo County Sheriff’s Patrol Deputy is recovering after she was exposed to fentanyl and briefly went unconscious after taking a suspect into custody early Tuesday morning.

Sheriff’s deputies responded at about 4 a.m. to the Loaf N Jug, 1700 Santa Fe, on an unwanted person at the store. Deputies contacted the man, identified as Anthony Gendoes, 31, and learned that he had an active warrant.

Deputies, who were wearing protective gloves, conducted a routine pat search of Gendoes and found suspected fentanyl pills and paraphernalia on him. Gendoes also admitted to deputies that he had just smoked fentanyl prior to having contact with the deputies. Deputies took Gendoes into custody without incident and placed him in a patrol car while they were processing the drugs and paraphernalia.

One of the deputies began feeling ill and subsequently went unconscious and fell



“‘This shocking incident demonstrates the dangers our deputies face with exposure to this deadly drug,’ said Pueblo County Sheriff David J. Lucero. ‘This is quite scary to know that even just slight exposure can have such devastating effects.’”

Source: Pueblo County Sheriff’s Office

to the ground. The second deputy quickly administered a dose of agency-issued Narcan, which is an FDA-approved drug to counteract the effects of opioid overdose. A second dose of Narcan was administered and the deputy regained consciousness. She was transported by ambulance to a local hospital where she was treated and released for the exposure. She is recovering at home.

The names of the deputies involved are not being released at this time due to this being an ongoing investigation.

Pueblo County Sheriff's deputies have been carrying Narcan in their vehicles since 2016. Through the years, deputies have administered Narcan to individuals who have overdosed, however, this was the first time it was used on a deputy."

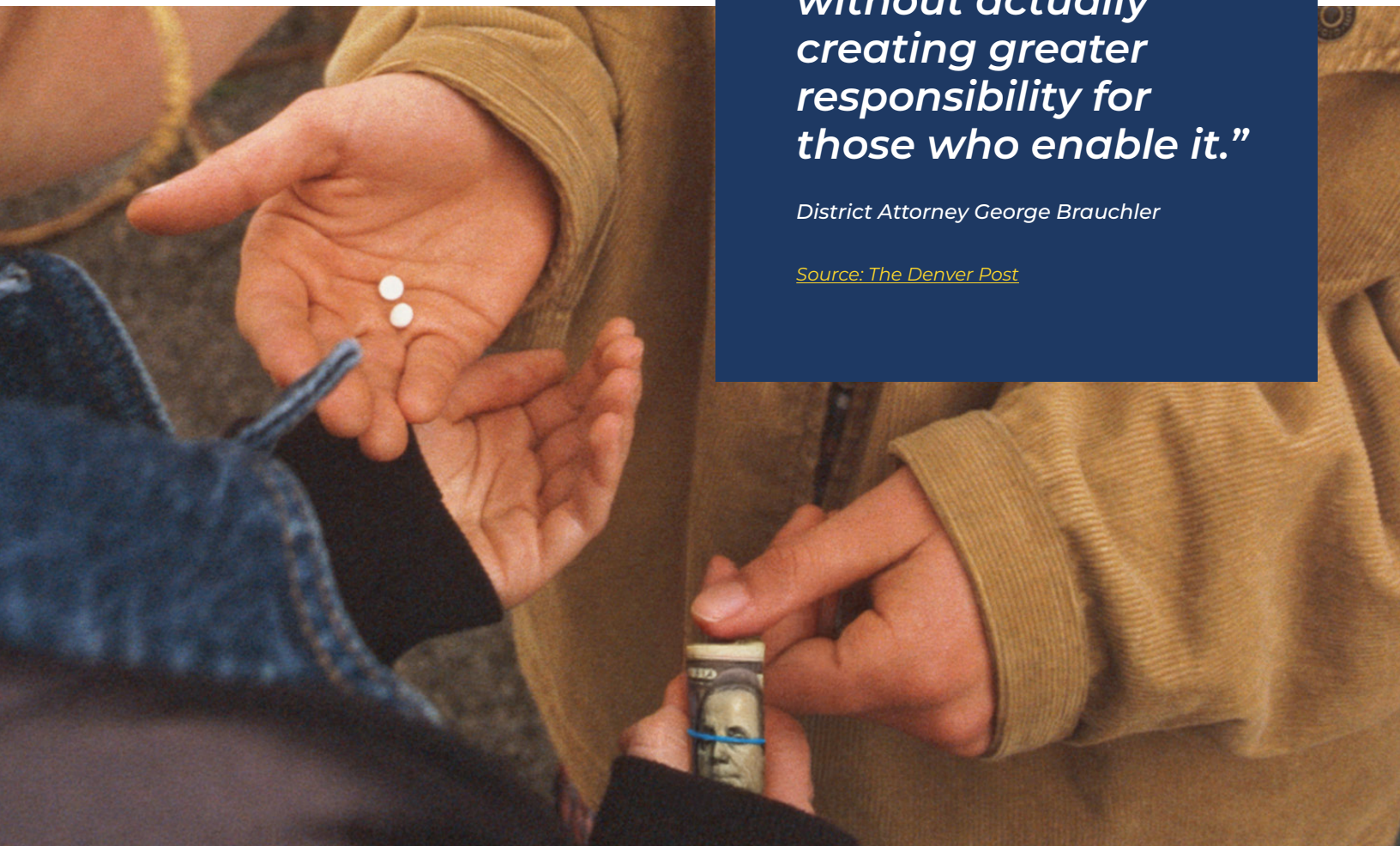
Source: Pueblo County Sheriff's Office



"The legislature's goal seems to be to look responsive to a deadly situation, without actually creating greater responsibility for those who enable it."

District Attorney George Brauchler

Source: The Denver Post





"Drug dealing is the most deliberate crime we see...Giving drug dealers who are selling poison to people on the streets a break is a problem, and now for them, the cost of doing this illegal business is worth it."

- Mitch Morrissey, former Denver District Attorney

Source: The Denver Post



"People who distribute narcotics are dealing death."

- District Attorney Michael Allen

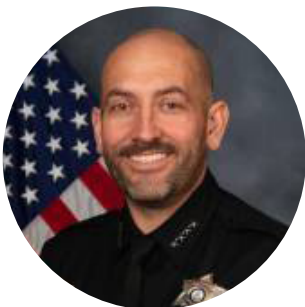
Source: El Paso County Sheriff's Office



"The fentanyl problem in Colorado has just exploded in the last couple of years."

- John Fabbriatore, former Field Office Director (FOD) for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

Source: Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster



"The fact that four grams of fentanyl was legal to possess here in Colorado is lunacy. You're talking about enough fentanyl to kill 1,500 people with four grams. Four packs of sugar. Four packs of sugar comes to be about four grams."

- Arapahoe County Sheriff Tyler Brown

Source: Devastated: Colorado's Fentanyl Disaster



"Fentanyl is dangerous. It is 100 times more potent than morphine. It is well known to law enforcement that I-70 is a corridor for drug trafficking. Certainly with Denver just being a short 30 miles down the road and Grand Junction to the west, we have had a number of cases where we have intercepted drugs moving from the metro area moving towards Grand Junction."

- Idaho Springs Chief of Police Nathan Buseck

Source: CBS News



"Fentanyl, as everyone knows, is one of the largest epidemics facing our country... I have all the sympathy in the world for an addict who wants to get clean and I will go to the end of the world for them to help. However, I have no tolerance for someone trying to poison our community."

- Chaffee County Sheriff Andy Rohrich

Source: KKTV News



"We have to improve our laws on fentanyl. We have to increase the penalties for distributing fentanyl. It is dangerous, it is lethal and it is fast. And it is ravaging our community."

- District Attorney Brian Mason

Source: 9News



PARENT-LED ORGANIZATIONS TACKLING THE FENTANYL CRISIS

Andrea Thomas, mother of Ashley Romero, co-founded the nonprofit Voices for Awareness after her daughter died in 2018 from a pill that was laced with fentanyl. Ashley decided to take the pill instead of going to the hospital after going into pancreatic attack.

“My daughter died almost instantly from taking that pill. So, on that day, I had to tell my 8-year-old grandson, the son to my daughter, that his mother was gone forever,” Thomas said.”

Andrea Thomas, according to her testimony during a committee hearing over Senate Bill 25-044, revealed that her other daughter

is currently caught in severe addiction and psychosis. Thomas fears she might end up in fentanyl distribution, and Thomas expressed a preference for her daughter to face felony charges rather than risk losing another daughter or another’s life due to her actions.

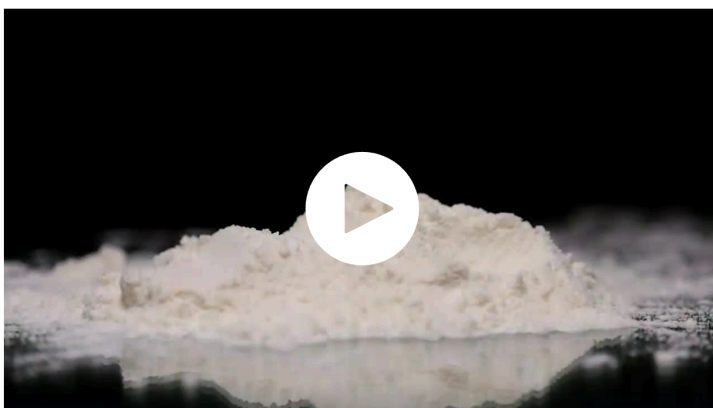
Thomas’s nonprofit, Voices for Awareness, educates the public about the risks associated with illegal substances, specifically fentanyl. She launched the Colorado Coalition for Families Affected by Fentanyl to bring greater awareness to lawmakers and leaders about families torn apart by fentanyl.

Source: [Denver7, Voice for Awareness, Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing February 10, 2025](#)

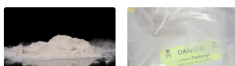
NEWS > LOCAL



Fentanyl-related deaths continue across Colorado, mother shares daughter's story



On Thursday, Denver Public Health officials confirmed they'd identified a case where drugs thought to be cocaine were actually a mix of fentanyl and lidocaine. Their confirmation comes as Denver-area nonprofits have taken to social media to publish messages warning of fentanyl-laced drugs in Denver metro.



By: CB Cotton

Posted 10:44 PM, Aug 05, 2021 and last updated 9:55 AM, Aug 06, 2021

NEXT WITH KYLE CLARK

Colorado parents who lost kids to fentanyl help launch education campaign at universities

Families along with an organization called Blue Rising partnered with 10 schools to reduce deaths on campuses

Source: 9News

“Is it a pill or is it poison?”

As part of the checklist, Blue Rising asked schools to use posters, magnets and koozies created by the group as part of its “You Can’t Outsmart Fentanyl” campaign, funded by \$150,000 in donations.

The items list drugs that may contain fentanyl and focus on the message that just 2 milligrams of fentanyl can kill a person. “Can you spot the fake?” asks a poster showing rows of Xanax. Another, depicting oxycodone pills, says “Is it a pill or is it poison?” They want universities to hang the posters in residence halls and stick the magnets on dorm refrigerators.

Source: The Colorado Sun



“I got into this because I had a child who in high school became addicted to opioids, and now I have a grandchild who’s 12 and I’m at this kind of fearful point that he’s about to enter into these very scary times. Twelve isn’t unreasonably young [to worry] any longer because kids are getting fentanyl-laced pills off of Snapchat. A lot of these overdose deaths are preventable if we focus on better policies.”

Former Congresswoman Mary Bono, Chair and CEO Mothers Against Prescription Drug Abuse

Source: Colorado Times Recorder



“A grieving mother is bringing attention to the narcotic that claimed her daughter’s life in hopes of saving others.

Maddie Wright, 23, died in 2020 after she took what she believed was oxycodone. Instead, the pill contained a lethal amount of fentanyl. The desire to save lives prompted Maddie’s mother, Julie, to create the Maddie Wright Foundation.

‘There’s children that have never even heard or tried drugs that are dying,’ Julie said. ‘Fentanyl is today’s weapon of death.’

The Maddie Wright Foundation aims to spread awareness about the harms of fentanyl and teach people how to use naloxone, a treatment that can save a person from an overdose. Naloxone is also known by the brand name, Narcan.

‘I feel if Maddie had known of the danger, she never would have taken that oxy pill,’ said Julie.”

[Source: Denver7](#)

Julie Wright, Maddie’s mom, told lawmakers that her daughter’s dealer purposely gave her fentanyl and sat around for 33 hours after she died.

“This person, this dealer of death, not only took lives before my daughter. She was caught by undercover Denver Police selling thousands of pills on Facebook. This could be to your children, to your nieces and nephews. She was advertising pain pills... When the police asked, [the dealer] said ‘I’m all about the bread, or money, I don’t care if lives are lost.’”

“Maddie was a bright and loving person and was always eager to help others and make people feel important.”

[Source: Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing February 10, 2025](#)

ADDRESSING THE CRISIS: SOLUTIONS FOR OUR STATE

Educators, policy makers, non-profits, parents, and citizens in all spheres have a role to play in curbing the fentanyl crisis in Colorado.



Too few students are intentionally warned about the risks of fentanyl and opioid use. When they reach college, they are flooded with access to drugs and endless opportunities to use and buy them. Tragically, we see many students overdose and lose their lives. Education about fentanyl and opioids in junior high and high school would prepare young people to avoid deadly drugs. Teachers, coaches, and parents all need to step in the gap and provide life-saving information. Parents may need to monitor or limit the use of apps like Snapchat and Facebook where fentanyl is often sold.



Penalties for drug dealers in Colorado are too low. Today, a dealer may sell up to fifty grams of fentanyl and still get out on parole or with a fine. Instead, to treat this crisis seriously and convince dealers that Colorado is hostile to their illicit business, every fentanyl dealer should be charged with mandatory prison time.



Rather than placing fentanyl users and addicts in jail, law enforcement wants to direct them to treatment programs. Making the use of fentanyl a treatment-mandated felony would serve Colorado well. If a person agrees to court-required treatment, the felony would be removed after the completion of treatment under this policy. California voters recently adopted treatment-mandated felonies for fentanyl users in 2024.



If Colorado adopts the treatment-mandated felony model, non-profits need to step in to create and fund effective treatment programs. Successful programs that already exist will need expansion in order to set users caught in a deadly cycle on the path to long-term recovery.

“Treatment works, treatment works, I know this for a fact, and rehabilitation is possible...”

Former City of Evans Police Chief Rick Brandt

Source: Colorado Times Recorder





The human cost of fentanyl in Colorado is unfathomable: broken families, ravaged communities, and state laws that handcuff law enforcement in their attempts to rid the state of deadly drugs.

By examining fentanyl's tragic effects on many families and individuals across the state, common sense Coloradans can find motivation to work together to ensure drug dealers are taken off the streets and fentanyl users get the treatment they need. There is a path forward for educators, policymakers, non-profits, and citizens to curb Colorado's fentanyl crisis and save lives. The sooner we act, the more lives we save.