

ISRAEL POLICE : Fentanyl Distribution Cases

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|| FENTANYL – GENERAL FACTS

Fentanyl is a synthetic (manmade) Opioid that is similar to Morphine; however, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) warns that it is 50-100 times more potent than Morphine. Fentanyl is used to treat pain and can cause side effects similar to those of other Opioid drugs, such as; Heroin, OxyContin and Morphine. In Israel, they're considered illegal drugs (without a prescription) according to the Drugs Ordinance Law; the chemical structure of Fentanyl is slightly different from that of Heroin. Fentanyl was originally synthesized as a powerful analgesic (pain reliever), and it is still used medically to treat severe pain following surgery or for chronic pain in people who are Opioid-tolerant, which means that other painkillers aren't as effective. Unlike Heroin, Fentanyl does have some accepted medicinal uses, so it is classified as a Schedule II controlled substance by the DEA. Schedule II drugs still have a very high potential for abuse and addiction despite their specific medical uses.

|| FENTANYL – METHODS OF USE

In most countries, Fentanyl is diverted from licit uses for abuse and is also manufactured without supervision in clandestine 'bootleg' or 'pirate' laboratories (i.e. Mexico), thus rendering the end-product dangerous and very lethal. Fentanyl is also often used as a cutting agent or filler for Heroin. Fentanyl can be absorbed through the skin and be lethal in very small doses, as little as 0.25 milligrams; tablets may be ingested or crushed and snorted, smoked, or injected. Prescription of Fentanyl comes in lozenges, buccal and sublingual tablets, nasal or oral sprays, and as an injectable.

In the State of Israel, Fentanyl is listed as a controlled narcotic and fortunately, it's manufactured and obtained via bonafide pharmaceutical companies, thus making it safer. Fentanyl is cheaper and easier to obtain than Heroin and is most commonly used as a transdermal patch form. When abused, Fentanyl patches may be sucked on, chewed, inserted into the body, or the gel can be scraped off the patches and injected; Fentanyl patches are affixed to the skin and replaced every 72 hours; the patch releases the preparation at a constant rate. Patches can also be "rolled & smoked" -aluminum foil is pressed against the patch's adhesive glue, then the foil is heated from underneath and once it releases harmful vapors ("steam") they are inhaled through a straw; illegal Fentanyl may be made into pills to look like other prescription Opioid medications. Fentanyl can be manufactured in powder form, or put on blotter paper to be placed under the tongue.

|| FENTANYL – SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects may range from mild to severe. Since Fentanyl is between 50 and 100 times more potent than Morphine, the side effects may be more intense, set in faster, or last longer. General, Opioid-like side effects of Fentanyl use on the brain and body may include: drowsiness, dizziness or fatigue, confusion, trouble concentrating, tightness in the throat, stiff or rigid muscles, relaxation and euphoria, constricted pupils, physical weakness, itching, depressed breathing, shallow breaths or irregular breaths, slowed heartbeat, sweating, flushing, constipation, dry mouth and nausea.

|| FENTANYL – RISK OF ADDICTION

Taking this drug repeatedly, whether as prescribed or for non-medical related reasons, increases the risk of addiction, dependence, and tolerance. However, a person who takes this medicine as instructed by their doctor, and with that doctor's supervision, is less likely to develop an addiction to this potent narcotic.

|| DRUG OVERDOSE DEATH RATES IN THE US:

(NCDAS) drug overdose deaths are up 30% year-over-year (The National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics); 96,779 drug overdose deaths were reported from March 2020 to March 2021; most of the deaths caused by overdose derive from opioids; drug overdoses have killed almost a million people since 1999. (CNN) an estimated 105,752 people died of drug overdoses in the 12-month period ending October 2021 according to provisional data published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistic.

Fentanyl and other synthetic Opioids have had a rapid and dramatic rise; overdose deaths involving these drugs have nearly doubled over the past two years, from about 35,000 deaths in the 12-month period ending October 2019 to more than 69,000 in October 2021. "Fentanyl, even at very, very small quantities, is lethal for most people," said an associate professor at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health whose research focuses on psychiatric and substance use epidemiology. "It's just an incredibly potent Opioid."



|| CARFENTANYL

Carfentanyl is a synthetic Opioid that users combine with Heroin to increase its euphoric effects. It's sold under the brand name "Wildnil", as an Opioid analgesic which is used in veterinary medicine to anesthetize large animals such as elephants and bears. It is typically administered in this context by tranquilizer dart. It is 10,000 times stronger than Morphine and 100 times stronger than Fentanyl. As such, it is easy to overdose on Carfentanyl. Users often experience severe side effects and fatalities. Carfentanyl comes in different forms, such as tablets and powder. Users can absorb it through the skin, inhale it, or ingest it. This method of abuse makes it extremely dangerous. This danger exists because the slightest contact with the drug can cause health problems. In September of 2022, two Greely, Colorado police officers were exposed and accidentally inhaled Carfentanyl powder in suspects' vehicle, and resulted being hospitalized in critical condition.

|| HOW FENTANYL REACHED THE ILLEGAL MARKET IN ISRAEL?

Some doctors are threatened by their patients to prescribe painkillers; non-professional physicians that prescribe Opioids for minor pains; forbidden relations and interactions between medical doctors and pharmacists; patients receiving large amounts of prescription drugs- using some for their own personal purposes and selling other doses (including to minors); committing thefts from pharmacies. In Israel, "Fenta" trafficking is largely conducted on Telegram. 5 Fentanyl patches (12 mcg-100 mcg) price ranges between 50-250 NIS (13-67 USD); 30 Actiq tablets (200 mcg-1200 mcg) price ranges between 750-1200 NIS (200-320 USD).

|| FORBIDDEN RELATIONS AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN DOCTORS AND PHARMACISTS IN ISRAEL (CASE STUDY)

An Israeli physician wrote prescriptions to patients that he never met nor treated. He operated an internet site for medical tourism in which the costumers filed requests to obtain any drug they desired. The physician prepared the prescriptions for the patients after the money was transferred to his bank account. Every week the physician arrived to a local pharmacy and purchased 30 prescriptions containing different drugs that he prescribed to his customers abroad. Large amounts of the drugs including narcotics and Opioids were mailed all over the world via the post office. The doctor was arrested by the police, customs and ministry of health, and was charged on possession and selling of medicine and narcotic drugs illegally. Point-in-fact: anyone who violates the provisions of this section is liable up to 20 years of imprisonment, i.e. forbidden relations with a doctor / pharmacist is considered a violation of the Physician's Ordinance - Israel Ministry of Health. Other violations and criminal offenses include money laundering and forgery of prescription drugs.

Prescription drugs were confiscated in the Dr.'s apartment. He also used stamps that belonged to other physicians to sign the illegal prescriptions. Fentanyl and Methylphenidate were also sold by a pharmacist illegally. During a joint raid conducted by Ministry of Health officials and police officers, a drug trafficker was caught selling Fentanyl patches and he presented, in his defense, a valid doctor's prescription. Methylphenidate is the active ingredient in two major drugs used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): Ritalin and Concerta. The potential for abuse has increased. Intranasal abuse produces effects rapidly that are similar to the effects of Cocaine in both onset and type. Fentanyl and Methylphenidate were sold by a pharmacist illegally (February 2022: Large Opioid "Bust" by Haifa Police Department).

|| NETANYA PD CASE SUMMARY

The Israel Police arrested a Netanya resident (a taxi driver) on suspicion of selling illegally prescribed patches and drugs while endangering the lives of users. The suspect was first apprehended on March 22nd, 2022 during a joint investigation led by the Youth Section Israel Police Headquarters, Netanya PD Youth Squad in collaboration with Ministry of Health officials. A search in his vehicle (taxi) revealed in his possession a total of 67 Fentanyl patches, 833 Oxycodone tablets, 8 bottles containing liquid Oxycodone (240 ml), 51 Buprenorphine tablets, 59 Xanax XR tablets (2 mg), 98 Clonex (Clonazepam) tablets (2 mg), 90 Vaben (Oxazepam) tablets (10 mg), 10 Assival tablets (10 mg) and 10 Tramadex tablets (10 mg). The suspect has remained incarcerated until the end of his proceedings (court trial). The State Attorney's Office filed an indictment against the suspect on 7 counts of drug trafficking including 4 minors ("exposing a minor to dangerous drugs" is considered a very serious offense in the State of Israel and liable up to 25 years of imprisonment). The suspect is presently awaiting trial. The operation was crowned a huge success and made major "waves" all over the media, including television interviews and news articles all aimed at raising public awareness regarding the abuse of Fentanyl.

|| STRATEGY ON COMBATING FENTANYL ABUSE / TRAFFICKING IN ISRAEL

Initiating and conducting joint inter-office collaboration & investigations (Police, Ministry of Health, Department of Justice, Ministry of Education, Customs, IRS, VAT); conducting undercover narcotics operations; applying "proactive" law enforcement by gathering intel on dealers and initiating covert investigations; physical presence of trained professionals from the Ministry of Health during ongoing police investigations; performing seizures and confiscations which lead to improved deterrence; increasing police law enforcement online (on Telegram and other internet platforms); collecting testimonies and evidence based data regarding recreational use of Fentanyl; conducting criminal prosecutions and submitting convictions based on the Israel Drug Ordinance Law / Pharmacist's Ordinance; prevention and intervention in schools and communities; raising public awareness by launching campaigns all over the media (radio, television and internet).

|| CHALLENGES WE FACE IN ISRAEL

Recruitment of other District Attorneys' Offices towards submitting more criminal indictments; combating counterfeit Fentanyl prescriptions by implementing more control and supervision through the use of technology thus improving Ministry of Health protocol (RIA – Regulatory Impact Assessment); joint police-ministry of health cooperation; gathering intel re: doctors / pharmacists whom are being threatened / extorted by patients; gathering intel re: doctors / pharmacists whom are illegally providing prescriptions / medication; increasing awareness within the medical field- public and private practices (doctors / pharmacists); gathering intel re: Fentanyl dealers / "couriers" trafficking on Telegram; data collection re: extent of use among adolescents by performing a recent study on recreational use of Fentanyl; reiterate successful cases / investigations i.e. conducted in Netanya PD Youth Squad in other police departments nationwide; initiate more "sting" based covert operations against Fentanyl dealers.

I dedicate this article in the memory of my dear beloved friend and fellow Pompidou member and police officer, Superintendent Bill Spearn, of the Vancouver Police Department. May your soul forever rest in peace.