

# The Real Deal on Fentanyl

## Dear Educator,

Overdose deaths in young people ages 10-19 **doubled** from 2019 to 2021, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The leading cause of these deaths is a synthetic opioid called **fentanyl**, which can be lethal in very small doses. Fentanyl is often found in illicit drugs and counterfeit pills, putting young people at risk of overdose. In 2020 alone, fentanyl was a factor in 76% of drug deaths of people ages 14-23.

To help counteract this threat, it is critical that teens, families, and educators understand the dangers of fentanyl and what they can do to prevent overdose deaths. The Ad Council and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) have teamed up with Young Minds Inspired to share **The Real Deal on Fentanyl**, to help inform students about this deadly drug and empower the members of your community to protect themselves.

Please share this program with other teachers at your school and your school nurse. And please share your opinion of the program by visiting [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-realdeal](https://ymiclassroom.com/feedback-realdeal).

Sincerely,  
Dominic Kinsley, PhD  
Editor in Chief  
Young Minds Inspired

## Target Audience

Grades 6-8

## Concepts & Skills

- Raise awareness and dispel myths about fentanyl
- Empower students to make healthy choices
- Foster open dialogue
- Reading informational text
- Critical thinking
- Decision making
- Communication

## Program Components

Available at [ymiclassroom.com/realdeal](https://ymiclassroom.com/realdeal):

- This teacher's guide
- A reproducible student activity sheet
- Activities for grades 9-12
- Spanish-language versions of the student activities
- A reproducible letter for parents and caregivers (in English and Spanish)
- An education standards chart
- An online feedback form

## How to Use This Program

Review the materials to decide how to approach the program. Speak with your administration to clarify any relevant policies, including on naloxone and student privacy related to discussing sensitive topics. Photocopy and distribute the activity sheet. When done, have students take home the completed activity with the letter for caregivers. You might also email the letter to families or share it online.

**Note:** Talking about fentanyl can be uncomfortable, but it is important. Overdose deaths are happening at young ages. Steer away from language that promotes judgment or stereotypes. (See <https://nida.nih.gov/nidamed-medical-health-professionals/health-professions-education/words-matter-terms-to-use-avoid-when-talking-about-addiction> for guidance.) Be sensitive that families may have experienced loss from fentanyl or substance use and let students know they may speak with a guidance counselor at any time.

## Activity Sheet: The Real Deal on Fentanyl

Begin by asking students if they have heard about fentanyl. Do they know what it is? Explain that counterfeit pills are fake pills made illegally with different ingredients than the actual medication. They look real but can be deadly.

**Part 1:** Have students work in small groups to complete the quiz, visiting [realdealonfentanyl.com](https://realdealonfentanyl.com) for answers.

Review the answers and clarifying details below to dispel any misperceptions.

**Answers: Part 1:** **1.** T; **2.** F, 2mg is a lethal dose — that's about the size of a few grains of sand or salt; **3.** T, this makes the drugs more addictive; **4.** T; **5.** F, counterfeit pills can look identical to real medications; **6.** F, fentanyl clumps, so one pill may contain a lethal dose even if the others in a batch do not; **7.** F, you should not share medication, even if you think it's from a doctor. Pills may change hands many times if being sold outside of a pharmacy, so your friend can't know what's in them. That's a real danger with counterfeit pills; **8.** T; **9.** T, opioid overdose reversal medications like naloxone are safe, legal, and easy to use by anyone; **10.** T, if you're concerned about a friend, you can talk with a trusted adult, too.

**Part 2:** Encourage students to share their ideas for healthy coping mechanisms, such as talking with a friend or trusted adult, playing their favorite sport, exploring nature, doing yoga or meditation, or finding

a creative outlet such as drawing, painting, clay craftwork, or creating music.

**Answers: Part 2:** 1 and 2. Answers will vary; 3. *Signs of an opioid overdose:* tiny pupils; limp body; unable to talk; pale, gray, or bluish skin, lips, nails; cold or clammy skin; breathing very slow or stopped; extremely sleepy or passing out; snoring, choking or gurgling sounds. *Actions to take:* Act fast: call 911 and tell them someone is unresponsive. *If appropriate for your group, share these additional actions:* Administer naloxone if you have it. Try to keep them awake and breathing. If the person is not breathing, do CPR if you know it. Lay the person on their side to prevent choking. Stay with the person until help comes and tell the paramedics what you know.

For additional information, check out [realdealonfentanyl.com/reduce-the-risk](https://realdealonfentanyl.com/reduce-the-risk).

**Follow-up:** Empower students by letting them know that they have the ability to help prevent fentanyl overdose by talking about it, being aware, making safe decisions, and watching out for others.

- Ask students: *Which of the quiz answers or other information you read surprised you the most? What surprised you the least?*
- If students have questions, help them identify reliable, valid sources of information.
- Divide students into groups and present the following scenarios. Ask them to brainstorm healthy and safe ways to respond to each situation. How would they advise a friend in the same situation?
  - You're feeling sad about your best friend moving away.
  - You injured your ankle at practice last week but don't want to tell your parents because you're afraid they'll make you skip your favorite after-school sport.
  - Your grades have fallen since you started middle school, and your parents are going to take your gaming console away if you don't do well on your next math test. But you're tired after school and it's hard to stay motivated.
  - In the above example, what if a friend offers you a pill to help you stay awake to study?

## Resources

- [realdealonfentanyl.com](https://realdealonfentanyl.com)
- [ymiclassroom.com/realdeal](https://ymiclassroom.com/realdeal)

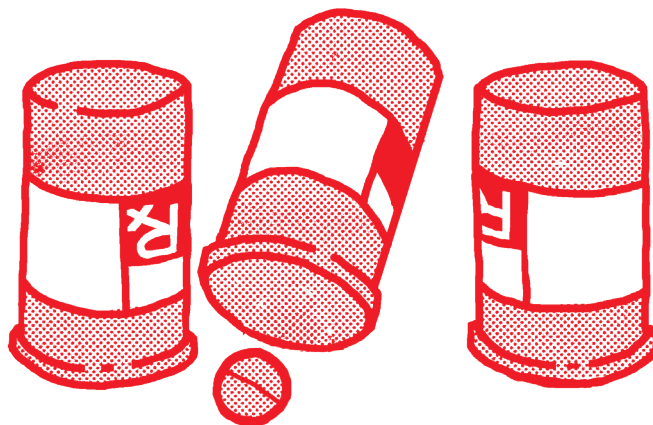


# The Real Deal on Fentanyl

## Part 1: Know the Facts

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid medication that is sometimes prescribed for severe pain, with a doctor's supervision. Because it's so powerful, it is being made illegally and is found in fake pills that look like regular medications. Fentanyl is responsible for thousands of deaths in people ages 10–19 every year.

To learn more, explore [realdealonfentanyl.com](https://realdealonfentanyl.com). Use the information you learn to determine if each statement below is true or false. Circle the correct answer.



Statement	True or False?
1. Illegal fentanyl is a powerful, deadly drug that is made in facilities with no controls for safety.	True / False
2. You have to take a lot of fentanyl to overdose.	True / False
3. Fentanyl is cheap to make and very powerful so it is often found in illegal drugs.	True / False
4. Fentanyl is often found in fake pills that look like those prescribed by doctors to help people with pain, anxiety, and focus.	True / False
5. You can identify counterfeit pills if you know what types of markings to look for.	True / False
6. Counterfeit pills are made in batches. If someone has already taken one pill from a particular batch, then the rest of the batch will be safe, too.	True / False
7. Sharing a friend's medication is safe if you know them well.	True / False
8. Real, safe medicines are only available with a prescription from your doctor and obtained from a licensed pharmacy.	True / False
9. There are medications available that reverse the effects of an overdose from opioids, including fentanyl.	True / False
10. If you're overwhelmed or feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed, it's OK to ask for help. Talk with a trusted adult about what you're going through.	True / False

## Part 2: Staying Safe

The most important thing to do to stay safe from fentanyl is to only take medicine prescribed to you by your doctor and filled at a licensed pharmacy.

To learn more on how you can stay safe and help others, think about the following questions. Write your answers on the back of this sheet.

**1. Managing Feelings** — There are many reasons people take drugs. Sometimes it is because they don't know how else to manage stress or big feelings, like anxiety, sadness, and shyness. Work with your group to make a list of safe, healthy ways to manage these feelings. For example, talking with a trusted adult or friend.

**2. My Trusted Adult** — Identify 2 to 3 trusted adults you could turn to if you were facing a big challenge or were concerned about a friend.

**3. Recognizing an Overdose** — What are the signs of an opioid overdose? What action can you take to help someone who may be in danger? Refer to [realdealonfentanyl.com](https://realdealonfentanyl.com) to learn more.

# The Real Deal on Fentanyl

## Parents and Caregivers,

The U.S. is facing an overdose crisis caused by fentanyl — a powerful synthetic opioid. In school, your child has been learning about the risks of fentanyl and reversing an opioid overdose with a program from the Ad Council, in partnership with the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and educational specialists at Young Minds Inspired. This handout features information about fentanyl to help you talk with your child about the crisis and help keep your family safe.



### What is fentanyl?

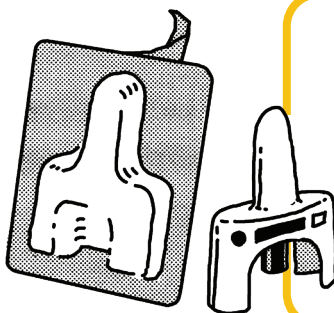
- Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine.
- It is cheap to produce and used to manufacture illicit drugs.
- It may be found in fake pills that look like real medication.

### How can we reduce the risks?

- Make sure your children know to only take pills prescribed by a doctor and filled at a pharmacy, and not to take pills from a friend even if they say that they're real.
- Know the signs of an overdose: tiny pupils; limp body; inability to talk; cold or clammy skin; breathing is very slow or has stopped; extremely sleepy or passing out; snoring, choking, or gurgling sounds; pale, gray, or bluish skin.
- Be prepared to take action in the event of an overdose.
- Carry naloxone.

### Why is fentanyl a concern?

- Overdose deaths among people ages 10-19 doubled from 2019 to 2021. 84% of these overdoses involved fentanyl.
- 2 milligrams of fentanyl is considered a potentially lethal amount — that's about the size of a few grains of sand or salt.
- You can't see, smell, or taste if a drug contains fentanyl.
- Many kids do not use fentanyl on purpose. They buy counterfeit pills online or get them from friends they trust to help them study or cope with stress or depressed feelings without knowing that they're fake versions of prescription pills and may contain fentanyl.



### What is naloxone?

- Naloxone is a fast-acting medication that can reverse an opioid overdose.
- It's safe, legal, and available without a prescription in all 50 states.
- Learn more at [dropthebomb.com/reverse-an-overdose](https://dropthebomb.com/reverse-an-overdose).

### How can I help my child?

- Talk with your child about the risks of fentanyl.
- Encourage them to speak with you or another trusted adult if they're struggling with emotions or are concerned about a friend.
- Discuss naloxone. Even if you feel that drugs and counterfeit pills are not something your family has to worry about, remember that you or your child could potentially save someone's life as a bystander by carrying naloxone.

## Learn more

Check out [realdealonfentanyl.com](https://realdealonfentanyl.com) with your child and [dropthebomb.com](https://dropthebomb.com) (for parents) to learn more about fentanyl and talking to your child about it.

