Truth or Hysteria: Investigating Cannabis – Fentanyl Contamination

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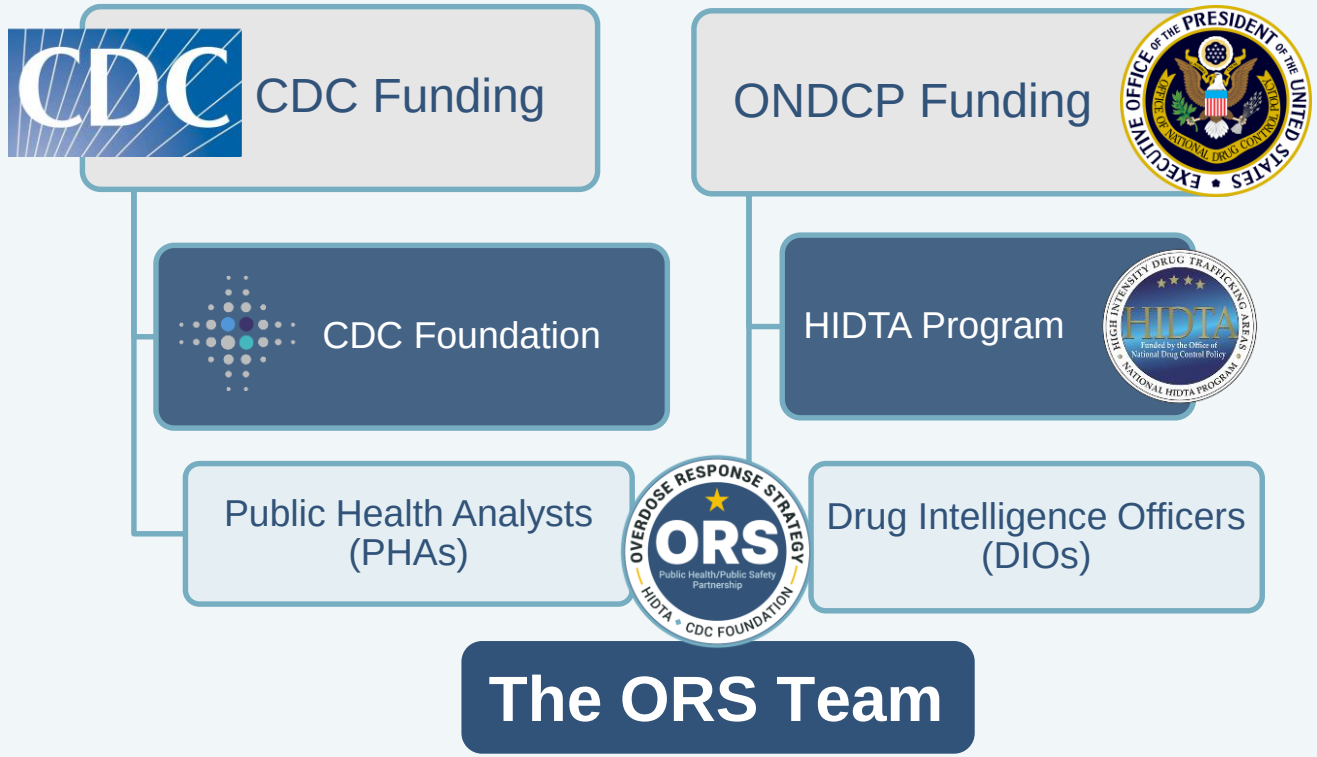
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Overdose Response Strategy

About the ORS

The ORS is a nationally coordinated, cross-sector collaboration between public health and public safety.

The mission of the ORS is to **help communities reduce fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses** by connecting public health and public safety agencies, sharing information and supporting evidence-based interventions.



The ORS Team

The ORS is implemented by 61 teams of DIOs and PHAs covering all 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Overdose Response Strategy

Program Goals

1. **Share data systems** to inform rapid and effective community overdose prevention efforts
2. Support immediate, **evidence-based response** efforts that can directly reduce overdose deaths
3. Design and use promising strategies at the **intersection of public health and public safety**
4. Support the implementation of **evidence-informed prevention strategies** that can reduce substance use and overdose

Visit us at ORSprogram.org!

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This presentation touches on fatal overdose, toxicology findings, grief, and substance use.

Some content may be emotionally difficult.

Please take care of yourself, step out if you need to, and rejoin when you are ready

Myth Busting: Marijuana Laced with Fentanyl

Fact from Fiction

As of today March 2nd 2026, there has been only one **confirmed** case in the United States of **marijuana contaminated with fentanyl**, this occurred in Plymouth, Connecticut, in October 2021.

This was confirmed by the Connecticut forensic laboratory and verified by the DEA Northeast laboratory.

The Connecticut Department of Public Health and the Connecticut State Police, working with the DEA, conducted separate reviews and concluded the most likely explanation was accidental cross-contamination, specifically marijuana placed into a container that had previously held fentanyl.

In addition, when suspected “fentanyl-laced marijuana” incidents are submitted for laboratory analysis, results do not find fentanyl in the suspected cannabis.

Where are the myths coming from ?

- Misunderstanding of fatal toxicology results
- Misunderstanding of Forensic evidence testing
- Grieving loved ones (unintentional)
- Law Enforcement (unintentional)

Misunderstanding of fatal toxicology results

What is Toxicology

What is toxicology

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at the National Institute of Health defines toxicology as a “field of science that helps us understand the harmful effects that chemicals, substances or situations can have on people, animals and the environment.

Toxicology = what is in the body

(Moss et al., 2017)

Toxicology testing, definition

- What it is
  - Laboratory testing for drugs, poisons, and chemicals in biological samples
- What it answers
  - Was the person exposed, and what substances are present
  - How much is present, and what the results may mean clinically or medically
- Common specimen types
  - Blood, urine, tissue, oral fluid, sometimes hair
- Typical output
  - Detected substances, concentrations (when applicable), interpretation in context

Misunderstanding of Forensic evidence testing

What is Forensics'

What is Forensics

The science of forensics, often called forensic science, is the application of scientific methods and laboratory techniques to recognize, collect, analyze, and interpret evidence so it can answer questions relevant to a legal investigation and be communicated in a way that is reliable for courts.

Forensics = What is in the substance

Forensic testing, definition

- What it is
  - Scientific laboratory testing of evidence for legal and investigative purposes

- In drug cases, what it answers
  - What is this substance, and what is it made of
  - Does this seized item contain fentanyl (or other drugs)

- Common evidence types
  - Powders, pills, residues, plant material, paraphernalia, packaging

- Typical output
  - Identification of substances present in the evidence, often with confirmatory methods suitable for court

Toxicology vs forensic testing, key differences

- Primary question
  - Toxicology, what is in the person
  - Forensic drug evidence testing, what is in the substance or item

- Sample type (matrix)
  - Toxicology, biological samples
  - Forensic, physical evidence items

- What a positive result can prove
  - Toxicology positive for fentanyl, supports exposure, does not prove the source
  - Evidence positive for fentanyl, supports fentanyl in that item, does not prove what entered the person

- Why this matters
  - Exposure and source are different questions, they require different tests

Grieving Loved Ones

How grief and misunderstanding can fuel the “laced cannabis” belief

- After an overdose death, families are often handed a toxicology report during intense grief and shock
- They may see THC listed along with fentanyl and assume the substances were in the same product
- Stigma around opioid use can make it emotionally harder to accept fentanyl or opioid use as the true cause
- Cannabis is widely viewed as common or “safer,” which can make “it was laced” feel like a more acceptable explanation
- Without clear explanation, toxicology results can be misread as proving source, rather than only showing exposure
- The result can be an understandable, human narrative that gives life to the myth, even when product testing does not support it

Law Enforcement

The Headlines

NEWS

After Norwalk PD seize fentanyl-laced cannabis, chief warns of 'alarming' rise in illegal cannabis

By **Kalleen Rose Ozanic**, *Staff Writer*
Updated Aug 8, 2024 4:24 p.m.

Fentanyl-laced marijuana, horse tranquilizer, and nitazenes listed as top emerging drug threats in US

By Anna Giaritelli

February 6, 2025 3:39 pm

NuggMD
https://www.nuggmd.com › blog › fentanyl ...

Fentanyl Laced Weed: How to Tell If Weed is Laced ...

Jul 22, 2024 · In this article, we'll clarify what laced cannabis is, identify basic ways you can tell if your cannabis has been tampered with, and detail steps you can take to get medical help if you suspect you have been exposed to laced ...



Addictions
https://www.addictions.com › blog › yes-marijuana...

Yes, Marijuana Laced with Fentanyl is Causing Fatal Overdoses

Fentanyl in Laced Weed | How to Know If Weed Is Lace... | Is Marijuana La

A dangerous and insidious trend has emerged, putting countless lives at risk. Fentanyl, a potent opioid, is being added to a variety of drugs, including marijuana. This deadly practice has led to a surge in overdoses across the country. It is important to know how to tell if weed is laced.

See more on addictions.com



Medical News Today
https://www.medicalnewstoday.com › artic...

Fentanyl laced marijuana: Risks, dangers, and more

Feb 17, 2023 · People who have concerns about fentanyl-laced cannabis can reduce their risk by buying legal cannabis and eliminate the risk by avoiding cannabis.



Snopes.com
https://www.snopes.com › fact-check › fen...

Is Fentanyl-Laced Marijuana Use on the Rise?

Claim: Fentanyl-laced marijuana use is a real and growing concern in the United States.



Limitations of Presumptive Drug Testing in Law Enforcement

🔍 Unintended Misinformation in Drug Evidence

- Law Enforcement often relies on presumptive field test for drug identification
- These tests are not definitive and frequently produce false positives and false negatives

⚠ Why are these tests unreliable

- Chemical Cross-Reactivity – Many substances trigger incorrect results
- Synthetic Drug Evolution – Constantly changing formulas outpace libraries
- Handheld Devices – Limited accuracy, unable to detect new chemicals
- Environmental & Human Factors – Contaminants, lighting, and Interpretation errors impact results

THANK YOU!

TOGETHER, WE CAN SAVE LIVES.

Thank you for your commitment to overdose prevention, collaboration, and healthier communities.

QUESTIONS? LET'S KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING!

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STAY CONNECTED. ACCESS RESOURCES.

Visit Our Website
orsprogram.org

Connecticut Team Profile
orsprogram.org/profile-team/connecticut/

We welcome your **questions, ideas, and partnerships!**

Resources

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