

Controlled Substances Sold Via Online Pharmacies

ASOP Global Fact Sheet – March 2017

AVAILABILITY OF CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES ONLINE

- In the U.S., the sale and purchase of controlled substances¹ on the internet without a valid prescription or to issue prescriptions virtually without an in-person consultation with a physician is expressly prohibited by the *Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008*. Internet pharmacies that do provide controlled substances consistent with the *Ryan Haight Act* must clearly disclose their location, license and names of pharmacy professionals on websites.²
- Of the 96% of all online pharmacies that operate in violation of state and federal laws, approximately 12% of these, **roughly 3,440 websites, sell controlled substances, typically without a prescription.**³
- In searching online for prescription opioids across the three major search engines, **nearly 91% of the first search results led users to an illegal online drug seller offering prescription opioids.**⁴
- Nearly two-thirds (2/3) of online pharmacies selling prescription opioids have some or the majority of their technical operations **within the United States.**⁵
- The sale of controlled substances online is immensely lucrative. Although counterfeit and adulterated with fentanyl and like analogues, an initial investment of a few thousand dollars for one kilogram of Chinese-manufactured fentanyl can yield **tens of millions of dollars in profit.**⁶

Figure 13. Potential Revenue Generated from Fentanyl Pill Sales Using 1 Kilogram of Fentanyl (in USC)			
Amount of Fentanyl Per Pill	Price Per Pill	Price Per Pill	Price Per Pill
	\$10	\$15	\$20
1.5 milligrams (666,666 pills)	\$6.6 million	\$9.9 million	\$13.3 million
1 milligram (1 million pills)	\$10 million	\$15 million	\$20 million

Source: DEA

- **Fentanyl and similar analogues, as well as the materials used in drug production, are available to purchase via online websites and Internet pharmacies.**⁷

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, Diversion Control Division, Controlled Substance Schedules. <https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/schedules/>

² <https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ425/PLAW-110publ425.pdf>

³ National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, Internet Drug Outlet Identification Program Progress Report: July 2016. https://nabp.pharmacy/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/idoi_report_july_2016.pdf

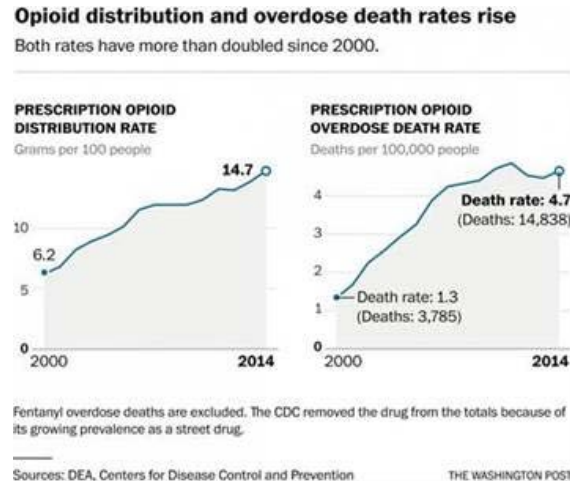
⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Online Opioids: Report Concerning Ease of Access, Highlighting Potential Solutions Using Existing Laws and Technology, Fisher College. May 2016. <http://bit.ly/2meY9XN>

⁶ Counterfeit Prescription Pills Containing Fentanyl: A Global Threat. Drug Enforcement Agency Intelligence Brief. July 2016. <https://www.dea.gov/docs/Counterfeit%20Prescription%20Pills.pdf>

⁷ *Id.*

- Illegal online drug sellers often promote the sale of prescription opioids through malware, spam, fraud and other illegal operations, placing consumers at **risk for financial and identity theft**.⁸
- Prescription opioids and other controlled substances are often **advertised through various social media platforms** popular among young adults and youth for which users are then redirected to illegal online pharmacy websites.⁹
- Counterfeit prescription drugs – including opioids and benzodiazepines – purchased online and “on the street” varies in purity and dosage amounts of active ingredients and is often laced with other substances, such as fentanyl, that can cause **unintentional overdose**.¹⁰



DEATHS DUE TO COUNTERFEIT CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES^{11,12}

- In 2015 alone, over **33,000 individuals** died from an opioid or opioid-related analogue overdose. This number now surpasses deaths due to motor vehicle accidents and is up 16% from the previous year.
- Deaths from prescription opioids have quadrupled since 1999.
- **91 Americans die every day** from an opioid-related overdose, including heroin and illicit opioids.
- Illegal online drug sellers often sell opioids, benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Ativan) and other controlled to consumers without any mention of the dangerous and often deadly effects of mixing the prescription medications.¹³
- There have been instances of dozens of related injuries, overdoses and deaths in a given town or city due to illegally manufactured and adulterated products, including examples in Pinellas County, FL, Sacramento, CA, and Monroe County, IL.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ TK Mackey, T Katsuki and R. Cuomo. Establishing a Link Between Prescription Drug Abuse and Illicit Online Pharmacies: Analysis of Twitter Data. December 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4704982/>

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Injury Prevention & Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/>

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Increases in Drug and Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths – United States, 2010-2015. December 2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm65051e1.htm>

¹³ *Id.*