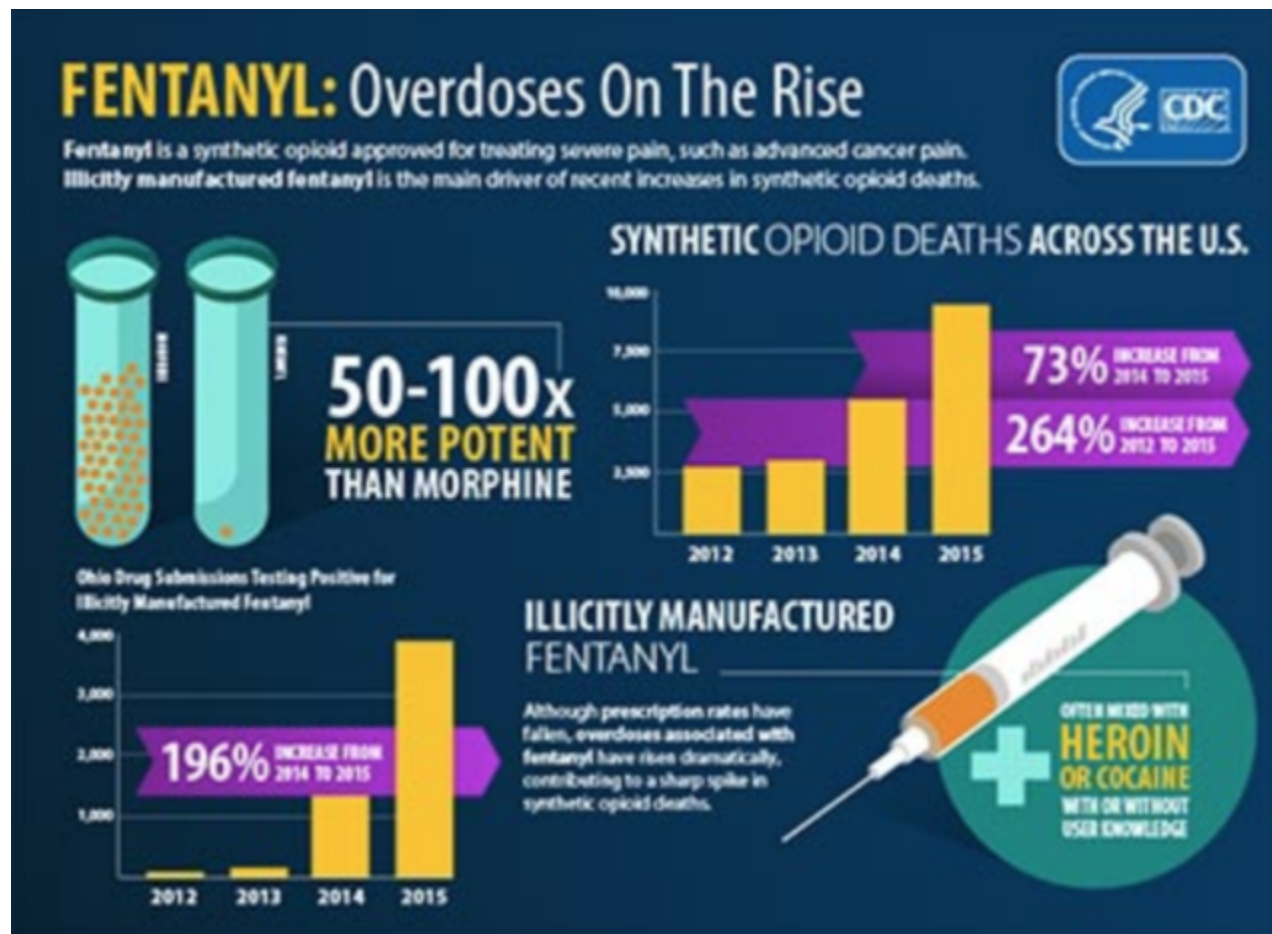


U.S. Attorney Weinhoeft Highly Concerned About Expiring Ban on Fentanyl Analogues on Feb. 6

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EAST ST. LOUIS - Steve Weinhoeft, the U.S. Attorney in East St. Louis today put out a strong plea to Congress about the upcoming expiration of a ban on all nonscheduled fentanyl-like substances. Today, anyone who possesses, imports, distributes, or manufactures any illicit, fentanyl-like substance is subject to criminal prosecution.

On February 6, 2018, in recognition of the unprecedented escalation in opioid-related overdoses as well as the White House directive to declare the opioid crisis a national public health emergency, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) used its emergency regulatory authority to place all nonscheduled fentanyl-like substances on the list of banned substances.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. While it can help alleviate severe pain when properly prescribed by a physician, fentanyl is also highly addictive and oftentimes deadly.

“We increasingly find it manufactured illegally in China and Mexico, trafficked by the cartels into the United States, and sold on the streets at great societal costs,” said U.S. Attorney Weinhoeft said. “According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 70,000 people died from drug overdoses in 2017, making it a leading cause of injury-related death in the United States. Sixty-eight percent of those deaths involved a prescription or illicit opioid; in roughly half of those cases, the fatal opioid was fentanyl.

“We see those same trends continuing here in the Southern District of Illinois. Last month, the Madison County coroner reported that most of the drug overdose deaths his office reviewed in 2019 involved fentanyl. The stories of local families directly impacted by those deaths are heartbreaking. Efforts to curb illicit fentanyl trafficking have been challenged by the proliferation of numerous chemical variations. These variations – known as fentanyl “analogues” – produce the same powerful opioid effects as fentanyl but remain chemically distinct. Because federal law identifies and regulates dangerous drugs according to their chemical properties, the ever-changing permutations of these fentanyl analogues pose a significant problem.

“If a particular chemical compound is not listed on the schedule of controlled substances, law enforcement is powerless to take action against it. Thankfully, for the past two years, this challenge has been alleviated through federal regulation.”

Weinhoeft then pointed out all can change next week.

“The DEA’s regulatory prohibition on fentanyl analogues is set to expire on February 6, 2020,” he said. “We need immediate legislative action so law enforcement can continue to regulate fentanyl.

"Fentanyl is a serial killer drug. The DEA continues to intercept variations of it being illicitly imported into the United States and distributed by criminal networks, causing overdose deaths across the country, including here in Southern Illinois. I urge Congress to extend the ban on fentanyl analogues so law enforcement will have the tools we need to keep our communities safe."