

# One pill can kill

## DEA officials discuss impact of fentanyl in Lubbock, Amarillo

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Amarillo Globe-News  
USA TODAY NETWORK

In 2023, Drug Enforcement Administration agents in Lubbock and Amarillo seized over 21,000 lethal doses of fentanyl. That number so far in 2024, as of early June, was over 29,000 lethal doses of fentanyl seized by DEA agents.

"Fentanyl pills and the organizations that traffic them have been identified through every corner of West Texas and the Panhandle," said Eduardo Chávez, special agent in charge of DEA's Dallas Field Division.

The grim and lethal reality of the impact fentanyl has on West Texas and the nation was emphasized at a DEA news conference recently in Lubbock.

Words like "poison" and "equalizer" were used by Chávez and several U.S. Attorneys for Texas and Oklahoma to describe fentanyl.

"It does not discriminate," Chávez said. "It does not see race or gender or whether you live in a gated community or public housing. It does not show grace to somebody who just wants to try it for the first time versus another who maybe has struggled with addiction for years. There is no such thing with this drug as experimentation."

For context, Chávez said an ordinary sugar packet one might pour into their coffee is equivalent to over 500 lethal doses of fentanyl.

U.S. Attorney Leigha Simonton of the Northern District of Texas said fentanyl is the biggest drug threat her

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# Fentanyl

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office has seen and is working diligently to combat it.

"Our office will not quit until we have rid the streets in Lubbock, in the Panhandle, in Amarillo of the scourge that is fentanyl."

While all of the attorneys said they are united in their efforts to stop people from dying from fentanyl, U.S. Attorney Clint Johnson of the Northern District of Oklahoma said it's not something the judicial system and law enforcement can combat on their own.

"We cannot litigate and arrest ourselves out of this existential threat we have to all of our communities," Johnson said. "It is going to take not only a whole of government approach, but a whole of community approach to make sure that we educate and make sure that others know about this poison."

To do that, the conversation must start at home with parents and guardians talking to kids. Since pills have an innocent connotation to being everywhere and people taking them to feel better, both Chávez and Simonton said people must be vigilant and talk to kids about taking pills from others due to not knowing if the pill has been laced with fentanyl.

"Tell your kids, tell everyone you know, do not take a pill unless it came from a pharmacy and was prescribed by a doctor," Simonton said. "Don't take one from your friends. Don't take one from a dealer. Don't take one from anyone because it very likely will kill you or get you addicted."

While fentanyl is a legal drug hospitals can administer, Chávez said when it comes to it being sold on the streets, there is no quality control over it.

"Fentanyl is an equalizer when it comes to the devastation that it can reap because of the milligram amount—that is literally the difference between life and death," Chávez said. "It can be devastating for somebody who just might want to try half. There is no quality control, and pills made in clandestine laboratories. There is no half of a pill the way we might think of a normal pharmaceutical drug."

The DEA operates the One Pill Can Kill program to educate the public. Johnson said that while the slogan might be "cute," it's the truth.

"Often in narcotics cases, when we have somebody that dies, we speak of it as an overdose. That is not the case with fentanyl," Johnson said. "Fentanyl is a poison."

Fentanyl affects not only the one who is taking it but also the family members of that individual, especially if someone dies. U.S. Attorney Bob Troester of the Western District of Oklahoma apologized to those families who have lost loved ones to fentanyl but said everyone is united to prevent another death from occurring.

"Federal law enforcement, federal prosecutors, state local law enforcement and state prosecutors are united to stop further families from suffering the pain that you suffered," Troester said. "We are united in the mission to take the powers of this poison and put them in prison where they need to be for harming our communities."

## Resources

If you or a loved one are struggling with drug addiction, here is a list of local resources to reach out to get help:

• **The Ranch at Dove Tree** — call 855-337-4626 or visit [ranchatdovetree.com](http://ranchatdovetree.com).

• **Prevention Resource Centers** — call 806-775-2933 or visit [prcne.org](http://prcne.org).

• **Hub City Outreach Center** — call 806-701-1687 or visit [hubcityoutreach-center.org](http://hubcityoutreach-center.org).

• **CENIKOR Amarillo** — visit [www.cenikor.org/locations/amarillo-texas](http://www.cenikor.org/locations/amarillo-texas).



DEA Dallas special agent in charge Eduardo Chávez speaks about the national fentanyl crisis and the organization's "One Pill Can Kill" campaign, June 12, at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

PHOTOS BY ANNIE RICE/ LUBBOCK AVALANCHE-JOURNAL



U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Leigha Simonton speaks about the national fentanyl crisis, June 12, at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

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