

(U) Fentanyl Used in Vape Pens



DEA
BULLETIN



San Diego
Field
Division



(U) This DEA Bulletin is based on preliminary reporting and may be subject to updating as additional information becomes available.

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(U) Event

(U//DSEN) On September 27, 2019, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) San Diego Field Division (SDFD) Overdose Response Team 10 was contacted by local authorities regarding a suspected fentanyl overdose death. The female roommate of the deceased told agents there was fentanyl and possibly carfentanil located in their shared residence, as well as fentanyl-laced "vape" tanks.

(U) Significance

(U//DSEN) While the presence of fentanyl powder (lethal in doses as small as two milligrams) poses an enormous public safety threat, the presence of fentanyl in the form of a gas poses a dire threat of unknown consequences.

(U//DSEN) The roommate of the deceased admitted to vaping fentanyl on a regular basis, including at a recent public concert, which caused her to pass out. The presence of fentanyl in public places illustrates a potentially lethal threat to the general population of San Diego by inadvertent exposure to a drug that is deadly in extremely small doses.

(U) Details

(U//DSEN) On September 27, 2019, SDFD Overdose Response Team 10 was contacted by local authorities regarding a suspected fentanyl overdose death. The deceased was a former U.S. Navy chemist who was, along with his surviving roommate, also a fentanyl user. DEA agents searched the residence and seized approximately five pounds of narcotic substances, to include fentanyl powder and multiple fentanyl derivatives. Agents also seized vape pens, syringes, a pill press (which tested presumptively positive for fentanyl), and methamphetamine.

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(U//DSEN) The San Diego County Medical Examiner (SDCME) reported that this was the first case they encountered involving the use of fentanyl in vape pens. The SDCME confirmed the following substances were present in one of the seized vape pens: carfentanil, furanyl fentanyl, cyclopropyl fentanyl, fentanyl, etizolam, and XLR-11 (a synthetic cannabinoid).

(U//DSEN) Health officials warn that the danger to the lungs from e-cigarettes, or vape pens, is not only occurring in those actively vaping. A new report finds bystanders, inhaling secondhand fumes, are at risk because a number of possibly hazardous chemicals are released by e-cigarettes. "The majority of studies have concluded that passive exposure may pose a health risk to bystanders, particularly vulnerable populations such as children and teens." (as reported by the Center for Community-Based Research at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston).

(U//DSEN) While the opioid crisis has been at the center of media attention for several years, the consequences of vaping have only recently made the headlines. During 2019, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that doctors have chronicled nearly 1,600 cases of patients who have contracted a mysterious lung-related illness that is suspected to be related to vaping. To date, there have been over 37 deaths attributed to this unknown illness.

(U//DSEN) The introduction of opioids into an epidemic that is still a mystery to public health professionals will only complicate their efforts to combat these crises. Additionally, there is an immediate threat to the public as more people may be willing to experiment with fentanyl-laced vape mixtures at home, or an enhanced threat if fentanyl-laced vape mixtures are used in public places.

ANALYST NOTE

Historically, vape pens have been a common method for cannabinoid users to inhale THC oils. Although this is the first known case of vape pens being used to ingest fentanyl, it may indicate a deadly trend for drug users whereby all manner of drugs may be placed into their vape pen cartridges.

On October 31, 2019, (in separate incidents) two high school students in West Virginia overdosed and were hospitalized as a result of vape pens laced with heroin.

U//DSEN: Information marked (U//DSEN) indicates DEA reporting at the Law Enforcement Sensitive (LES) level.

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