FENTANYL

Fake pills, real risk: the facts, the numbers, and how to respond.

Know the Basics

What it is

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid about 50 times stronger than heroin. Doctors use it in hospitals, but illegally made fentanyl drives most overdose deaths.

Hidden in fake pills

Criminals press fentanyl into pills made to look like Percocet, Xanax or Adderall. You can't see, smell or taste it.

A tiny amount can kill

About 2 mg, an amount that fits on the tip of a pencil, can be a deadly dose.

How overdose happens

Opioids slow breathing, and too much stops it. Mixing with alcohol or other sedating drugs raises the risk.

The only safe pill

A pill is only safe if it came from a pharmacy and was prescribed to you. Pills from friends or social media can be fake.

THE REAL NUMBERS

99%+
of Indiana 7th–12th graders did **not** misuse prescription drugs in the past month (2026 Indiana Youth Survey).

5 in 10
fake pills tested by the DEA in 2024 held a potentially deadly dose of fentanyl.

22
U.S. teens ages 14–18 died of overdose each week in 2022, driven mostly by fentanyl in fake pills.

Sources: 2026 Indiana Youth Survey; DEA; New England Journal of Medicine (2024)

Overdose Deaths: Indiana & the Nation (All Ages)

Measure	Indiana	United States
Overdose deaths, 2024	**1,618** (24.1 per 100,000 people)	**About 81,000**
Change from 2023	**25.8% lower** (rate)	**About 1 in 4 fewer** (count)
Main drug involved	Illicit fentanyl, then methamphetamine	Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids

Compare with care: Indiana's change is a **rate** (deaths per 100,000 people), while the U.S. change is a **count**, so they aren't the same measure. These numbers cover all ages, not just teens. Recent national numbers are provisional and may change. Indiana: Indiana Department of Health; U.S.: CDC.

Laws & Safety in Indiana

- **Aaron's Law** protects people who give naloxone in good faith, call 911 and cooperate from certain charges, including drug possession.
- **Naloxone (Narcan)** is sold over the counter. Find free naloxone at in.gov/health/overdose-prevention.
- **Sharing is dealing.** Giving or selling a drug that causes someone's death can be charged as a Level 1 felony, Indiana's most serious level.

Overdose: What To Do

Signs: won't wake up, slow or no breathing, blue or gray lips, tiny pupils, gurgling or snoring sounds.

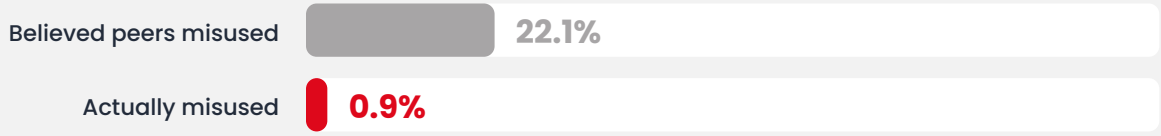
1. **Call 911.**
2. **Give naloxone.** If there's no response in 2–3 minutes, give a second dose.
3. **Lay them on their side** and stay until help arrives.

Using Data in a Norms Campaign

Social norms work when the numbers are accurate, local and believable.

Fentanyl campaigns need a different balance. Very few teens misuse pills, yet overdoses still happen because fake pills are so deadly. The strongest message pairs the healthy majority with one skill: knowing how to respond. Accurate numbers keep that message believable.

The Perception Gap: Prescription Drug Misuse, Indiana 7th–12th Graders



Past-month misuse of prescription drugs, grades 7–12 combined, 2026 Indiana Youth Survey. The survey doesn't ask about fentanyl directly, but fake pills are made to look like prescription drugs.

DO

- **Lead with the healthy majority:** "More than 99 in 100 Indiana students in grades 7–12 didn't misuse prescription drugs in the past month."
- **Pair the norm with a skill:** overdose signs, naloxone and "only take pills from a pharmacy."
- **Keep use data and harm data separate.** Survey rates show how many teens use; death data show harm.
- **Use the newest numbers.** DEA's fake-pill figure was 7 in 10 in 2023 and 5 in 10 in 2024.
- **Name the source and year** on every message.

DON'T

- **Use deaths as shock statistics** without action steps. Fear alone tends to backfire.
- **Imply that many teens use fentanyl.** They don't, and saying so can normalize pill use.
- **Compare counts with rates,** or provisional numbers with final ones.
- **Shame people who use drugs.** Stigma keeps people from calling 911.
- **Assume local data matches state data.** Overdose rates vary widely by county.

Message Makeover

WEAK

"Fentanyl is everywhere and it's killing kids!"

STRONGER

"Most of us never take pills that aren't ours. [School] students know the signs of overdose and look out for each other."

[Insert your local number and source.]

Find Your Local Data

1. **Ask your school counselor or principal** whether your school took part in the Indiana Youth Survey. Participating schools get their own report.
2. **Contact your county's Local Coordinating Council (LCC)** or local prevention coalition. Many have county-level data.
3. **Check the Indiana Department of Health overdose dashboard** for county overdose data, and inys.indiana.edu for survey results.
4. **No local data?** Use state data and label it clearly as Indiana statewide.

Sources: Indiana Youth Survey 2026, Prevention Insights, IU School of Public Health-Bloomington; Indiana Department of Health; DEA; Friedman et al., *New England Journal of Medicine* (2024); CDC; Indiana Code.