Jul 18, 2022

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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Demand to Classify Illicit Fentanyl a WMD

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Following two mass overdose incidents in a week in two Florida counties and the meteoric increase in deaths related to fentanyl nationwide, Attorney General Ashley Moody is calling on President Joe Biden to classify illicit fentanyl as a Weapon of Mass Destruction. Last Tuesday, in Tampa, police responded to a convenience store where seven individuals were found unresponsive after consuming drugs laced with fentanyl and a veterinary tranquilizer. Over the recent Fourth of July weekend in Gadsden County, at least 19 people overdosed on fentanyl. Back in March, five West Point cadets overdosed on cocaine mixed with fentanyl while on spring break in Wilton Manors—exposing a first responder who also overdosed attempting to resuscitate the cadets. According to reports, more than 75,000 Americans died of an opioid overdose during the 12-month period ending in April 2021, primarily from synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

Attorney General Moody today sent a letter to President Biden demanding he take immediate action to stop the fentanyl crisis killing hundreds of Americans every day. The letter directs the president to classify fentanyl as a WMD, enabling and requiring more parts of the federal government to coordinate a uniform response to illicit fentanyl, including the Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, Drug Enforcement Administration and Department of Defense.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “Border patrol has seized enough fentanyl to the kill the entire American population many times over. With that in mind, and the recent mass overdose events in Hillsborough and Gadsden counties, I am demanding President Biden classify illicit fentanyl as a Weapon of Mass Destruction. The federal government already works to disrupt the supply chains of other chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons—it’s not hard to imagine that similar tactics could be used to reduce the flow of illicit fentanyl into the U.S. through cartels in Mexico—and save countless American lives.”

According to DHS, a WMD is a nuclear, radiological, chemical, biological or other device that is intended to harm a large number of people. In 2018, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate assessed that “fentanyl is very likely a viable option for a chemical weapon attack.”

In 2019, DHS considered the designation. A memo from James McDonnell, then-assistant secretary for the DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, states that the drug’s “high toxicity and increasing availability are attractive to threat actors seeking non-conventional materials for a chemical weapons attack.” According to the memo, DOD also proposed fentanyl receive a WMD designation.

Fentanyl is a highly deadly synthetic opioid. Just two milligrams can be lethal. It is now the number one killer of adults ages 18-45. Fentanyl-related deaths among teens increased 168% in 2020, with 680 deaths nationwide—last year, 77% of all teen overdose deaths involved fentanyl. Many of these deaths can be attributed to use of counterfeit prescription pills laced with fentanyl, coming from Mexican drug cartels. It is estimated that at least one third of illicitly manufactured pills are contaminated with fentanyl, and users often have no idea that they are ingesting the lethal substance.

To read the full letter, click here.

Attorney General Moody recently released the Fast Facts on Fentanyl Toolkit, an informational resource for parents to help protect children from digital drug dealers online. The toolkit highlights how drug dealers utilize social media to sell illicit substances and warns that those substances may contain deadly amounts of synthetic opioids.

To download the Fast Facts on Fentanyl Toolkit in English, click here.

To download the Fast Facts on Fentanyl Toolkit in Spanish, click here.