1. Fentanyl is an extremely powerful synthetic opioid similar to morphine, but is 50 to 100 times more potent.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\) It is legally used to manage intense pain after surgery and sometimes to treat chronic pain.\(^3\) In prescription form, it is known by such names as Actig®, Duragesic® and Sublimaze®. Fentanyl is an opioid analgesic, a type of drug that binds with opioid receptors and blocks the transmission of pain signals to the brain.\(^4\)

2. Non-prescription fentanyl sold through the illegal drug market can be used as a stand-alone substance or mixed with other substances, including heroin. It can be delivered in several formats, including as a powder, transdermal patch, nasal spray or in counterfeit tablets disguised as other prescription drugs.\(^5\)\(^,\)\(^6\) The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports fentanyl is pressed into counterfeit tablets mimicking commonly misused prescription opioids such as hydrocodone and oxycodone.\(^7\)\(^,\)\(^8\) A Feb. 22, 2017 article in the New England Journal of Medicine reported a recent analysis in Canada showed fentanyl present in 89 percent of seized counterfeit Xanax (alprazolam), Norco (acetaminophen-hydrocodone) and other medications.\(^9\)\(^,\)\(^10\)

3. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency also addressed counterfeit pills, reporting “in many cases, the shape, colorings and markings were consistent with authentic prescription medications and the presence of fentanyl was only detected after laboratory analysis.”\(^11\) The DEA reports non-pharmaceutical fentanyl is often packaged as a powder form in waxed envelopes or glassine bags stamped with brand names such as “Ghost,” “Get Right,” “El Chapo” and “56 Nights.”\(^12\) Some instances of fentanyl pain-relief patches being cut up and smoked or ingested have been reported.\(^13\)

4. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation confirms law enforcement officials in Tennessee have made several kilo-plus size seizures of fentanyl analogues across Tennessee, in forms such as heroin and numerous counterfeit versions of hydrocodone, oxycodone, Percocet and other commonly misused pain relief medications. A Tennessee law enforcement agency in 2015 recovered what appeared to be several 30mg pills of oxycodone during a traffic stop. Each was the same size and featured the signature A/215 stamp characteristic of oxycodone. However, laboratory analysis performed by TBI forensic scientists indicated the pills were counterfeit and did not contain oxycodone. Instead, they contained fentanyl.

5. In August 2016, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a Health Alert Network update advising law enforcement to use extreme caution when handling suspected illicitly manufactured fentanyl, white powders and unknown substances.\(^14\) Tennessee residents finding an unknown substance or pill they suspect might contain fentanyl should not handle it; the safest action is to notify local law enforcement for safe disposal. Drugs should never be flushed down toilets or sinks.

6. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, in 2015, issued a nationwide alert on fentanyl as a threat to health and public safety.\(^15\) That alert quoted DEA Administrator Michele M. Leonhart: “Drug incidents and overdoses related to fentanyl are occurring at an alarming rate throughout the United States and represent a significant threat to public health and safety. Fentanyl is extremely dangerous to law enforcement and anyone else who comes in contact with it. We have lost too many Americans to drug overdoses and we strongly encourage parents, caregivers, teachers, local law enforcement and mentors to firmly and passionately educate others about the dangers of drug abuse, and to seek immediate help and treatment for those addicted to drugs.”
7. From 2013 to 2015 in Tennessee, the appearance of fentanyl in drugs associated with overdose deaths has more than doubled, from five percent in 2013 to 12 percent in 2015. See chart below, representing drugs present in overdose deaths in the state*:

Opioids Present In Overdose Deaths*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Opioid</th>
<th>Fentanyl</th>
<th>Heroin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages for fentanyl and heroin are included in the opioid category and are broken out for clarity.

8. The National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS), a program of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Diversion Control Division, collects drug identification results and other information from federal, state and local forensic laboratories. In March 2017, NFLIS issued a brief on fentanyl; that report stated “Fentanyl-related overdose deaths increased from about 550 deaths in 2013 to more than 2,000 deaths in 2014 and 2015.” The report also stated “Although pharmaceutical fentanyl is diverted for abuse in the United States, the majority of fentanyl drug reports and fentanyl reported with other drugs results from clandestinely produced and trafficked fentanyl, not diverted fentanyl.” To see the March 2017 report, visit: https://www.nflis.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/DesktopModules/ReportDownloads/Reports/NFLISFentanylBrief2017.pdf

Included in the March 2017 NFLIS brief are two pieces showing fentanyl reports by state in 2001 and 2015, and a graph showing fentanyl reports from January 2001 to December 2015 (all provided below). The latter report shows fentanyl reports increasing dramatically in 2014 and 2015.
9. Assistance is available is to help Tennessee residents with substance use disorders. The Tennessee REDLINE (1-800-889-9789) is a toll-free information and referral line coordinated by the Tennessee Association of Alcohol, Drug & Other Addiction Services (TAADAS) and funded by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

TDH Commissioner John Dreyzehner, MD, MPH talks about the dangers associated with fentanyl at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvJxFJ-fUXQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvJxFJ-fUXQ).

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