



Closing the Pipeline: America's Opioid Misuse Epidemic

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As policymakers work to solve America's opioid misuse epidemic – an unprecedented public health crisis – a major vulnerability fueling the epidemic has yet to be addressed. Every day, packages containing toxic, counterfeit and illicit drugs are shipped from foreign posts through the U.S. Postal Service without sufficient security data to determine their origins or stop hazardous materials from reaching U.S. soil.

As the epidemic claims lives in historic numbers across the country, Americans for Securing All Packages (ASAP) is committed to closing the pipeline that allows illicit, dangerous and often deadly drugs into the United States. To express the severity of the crisis and the need to take immediate action, please find below a snapshot of recent news, facts, and updates related to the epidemic.

Fast Facts

Nationwide

- Approximately **78** Americans die from opioid overdoses **every day**. ([Centers for Disease Control](#))
- Drug overdose is the *leading* cause of accidental death in the United States. ([Centers for Disease Control](#))
- More Americans die from drug overdoses than in traffic accidents each year and more than **three out of every five** fatalities involve an opioid. ([White House Fact Sheet](#))

While the opioid misuse epidemic has gripped the nation, some communities have been hit especially hard. Here are some of the most staggering statistics from across the country.

Kentucky

- On the night of August 24th, Montgomery County reported **12** overdoses in just five hours. ([Courier-Journal](#))
- **15** overdoses, **12** of which were fatal, were reported across Kentucky over the 2016 Labor Day holiday weekend. ([River City News](#))

Ohio

- In August, there were **174** drug overdoses in Cincinnati over just **six** days – an average of **29** overdoses each day. Hamilton County's heroin task force reports the daily average is now closer to **20 – 25** overdoses, a public health crisis local police are calling the new normal. ([NPR](#))
- Authorities in Akron saw over **230** overdoses in July, **20** of which were fatal. Several were linked to carfentanyl. ([NBC News](#))
- Cuyahoga County is on pace to log more than **500** overdose deaths from heroin, fentanyl or a combination of the two this year. **Seven** people died from heroin or fentanyl overdoses this past Saturday alone. ([Cleveland Plain Dealer](#))

Pennsylvania

- **18** overdoses (**three** fatal) were reported in Washington County over just one weekend in August 2016. ([WPXI](#))
- Butler County authorities have responded to **28** overdoses in August and **eight** in September to date. ([WPXI](#))

New Hampshire

- Heroin overdoses have already killed **65** people in Manchester this year, and emergency services have responded to over **540** overdose-related calls. ([Union Leader](#))
- As of early September, **241** people died from drug overdoses across the state this year, with a vast majority of the deaths involving fentanyl. ([Union Leader](#))
- New Hampshire's Chief Medical Examiner projects **480** people will die from drug overdoses in New Hampshire this year – **41** more than in 2015. ([Union Leader](#))

West Virginia

- West Virginia has the highest rate of overdose fatalities in the nation. **643** people died from drug overdoses in 2015, nearly breaking the record of **656** drug-related deaths in 2011. ([Charleston Gazette-Mail](#))
- On a single day in August, **27** people suffered from drug overdoses in the city of Huntington, **two** of which were fatal. The federal indictment against the man accused of distributing the drugs alleges they were mixed with fentanyl. ([Herald Dispatch](#))

Thoughts on the Epidemic

"We are in the midst of an epidemic, and sadly no one is immune, no individual, no family, no community," [said Attorney General Loretta Lynch](#).

"Both drugs, along with a growing cornucopia of illicit synthetics, are largely being [manufactured in China](#)," [said Drug Enforcement Administration spokesman Russ Baer](#), *"and smuggled into the United States both over land and through the U.S. Postal Service."*

"The real drivers behind counterfeit pills [are] actually the dark web and bitcoin," [said Joseph Lee, medical director of the Hazelden Betty Ford Youth Continuum in Minnesota](#). *"I see kids from around the country who use bitcoin and the dark web to get thousands of pills from China, from Canada and other clandestine labs that look like the real things in the United States."*

"China's lax regulatory controls have enabled unscrupulous chemists and drug cartels to manufacture and export deadly fentanyl-like products into our country," [said Senator Patrick J. Toomey of Pennsylvania](#).

Executive Action

On September 16, President Barack Obama designated the first-ever [Prescription Opioid and Heroin Epidemic Awareness Week](#) to remember Americans who have lost their battle with addiction, celebrate those on the courageous path to recovery and increase awareness about the epidemic and its devastating impact on communities across the country. The Obama Administration has called on Congress to provide \$1.1 billion to expand access to treatment services for opioid misuse.

In response, Americans for Securing All Packages issued a [press release](#) urging the Administration to close a largely ignored loophole in the global system which has created a pipeline for deadly opioids to enter communities across the country.

Legislative Action

Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), Ron Johnson (R-WI) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) recently introduced the [Synthetics Trafficking & Overdose Prevention \(STOP\) Act](#) which would require electronic security data on all packages shipped to the United States from abroad. The legislation is designed to make sure U.S. intelligence agencies are equipped to target and stop packages containing weapons, biohazards, synthetic drugs and other illegal or counterfeit materials from reaching the U.S. through the Postal Service.

Building on this initiative, Representatives Pat Tiberi (R-OH) and Richard Neal (D-MA) introduced [similar bipartisan legislation](#) in the House of Representatives that would require advance electronic security data on all packages shipped to the United States.

On September 16, the [U.S. Senate Finance Committee](#) sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry urging the Obama Administration to implement a plan to combat trafficking of illegal drugs and counterfeit goods, and consider the problem of dangerous synthetic drugs and counterfeit goods entering the United States due to weaknesses in international mail security standards.

Events

On September 19, the **Hudson Institute** hosted “[Handle with Fear: Fixing a Broken International Postal System](#),” a roundtable discussion on vulnerabilities in the global postal system. A coalition of experts recommended reforms and changes for the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and Universal Postal Union (UPU) to implement – including new technologies that would potentially make the global postal system safer.

Reports & Studies

[Americans for Securing All Packages \(ASAP\)](#) recently released a [survey](#) which found that a majority of American voters believe it is time to close the loophole that allows approximately one million packages into the United States without advance security data each day.

Key findings from the survey include:

- **85** percent of voters are unaware of a loophole that allows foreign posts to ship parcels to the United States without advance electronic security data.
- **75** percent of voters – including **50** percent of Democrats and **55** percent of Republicans – are concerned the loophole is contributing to the opioid misuse epidemic
- After learning about the national security and health implications of the loophole, support for closing the loophole jumps from **68** percent to **82** percent of voters. **68** percent of voters believe taking action will make it harder for bad actors to ship weapons, drugs or hazardous materials into the U.S.

In the News

For Small-Town Cops, Opioid Scourge Hits Close to Home (Wall Street Journal 9/28)

During an attempted drug-trafficking bust this spring on Chicago’s South Side, police Sgt. James Madden took off running after a young man, chasing him into a darkened yard before losing the trail. Sgt. Madden didn’t know where he was going. That’s because he works for a sheriff’s office 500 miles away, in the northwestern corner of Wisconsin. The officer’s work doesn’t normally take him so far from his home of Superior, Wis., (population 27,000), but today’s drug trade is imposing unprecedented new burdens on small-town law enforcement. He made the eight-hour drive to pursue a Chicagoan who allegedly traveled to Superior to sell large quantities of a dangerous drug called fentanyl, a synthetic opioid up to 50 times as potent as heroin. [Link](#)

Postal Service unwittingly fuels opioid epidemic by delivering foreign drugs right to U.S. doorsteps (Washington Times 9/27)

The new drug mules aren’t gang members or down-and-out ex-cons or even children trying to make a quick buck. In fact, the latest players in drug trafficking often wear a uniform, drive a government car and are due to collect a taxpayer-backed pension when they retire — from the U.S. Postal Service. Authorities say that the ongoing opioid epidemic is being fueled by the mail, tracing paths from India or China right to Americans’ doorsteps. [Link](#)

Drugs Now Kill More People than Cars and Guns (CNN 9/24)

In modern history, few things have caused such a sharp spike in US deaths as drug overdoses. CNN reached out to every state for the latest statistics on drug deaths, with half providing data from 2015. It found that drugs deaths continue to rise rapidly in many states. Epidemiologists in several states blame the increasing number of drug-related deaths on greater use of heroin and synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl. [Link](#)

Opioid epidemic’s hidden hazard: SWAT officers treated for fentanyl exposure during drug raid (Washington Post 9/14)

Amid the nation’s deadly and unrelenting opioid epidemic, U.S. law enforcement officers are shouldering an increasingly heavy burden — battling a booming drug market and responding to an endless string of narcotics-related calls while attempting to protect themselves from exposure to the lethal substances. Of particular concern is the potent synthetic

opioid fentanyl, the subject of numerous alerts and advisories from the Drug Enforcement Administration, which has warned the nation's policing community "to exercise extreme caution." [Link](#)

Lawmakers See Synthetics as Growing Drug Abuse Challenge (Roll Call 9/13)

Lawmakers are trying to draw attention to a rapidly emerging overdose crisis caused by synthetic drugs, less than two months after a bill to combat prescription opioid and heroin abuse was signed into law. The opioid measure included provisions that make it easier for the government to prosecute drug traffickers, but synthetic drugs pose a different kind of challenge that wasn't addressed in the legislation. While most drugs are on a list of controlled substances, synthetics can escape law enforcement scrutiny if the chemists who make them tweak their formulas slightly. [Link](#)

Portman: Need to put a stop to deadly mail (Cincinnati Enquirer 9/12)

Here in Cincinnati, in just one six-day span a couple of weeks ago, 174 people overdosed on heroin – an unprecedented and tragic spike. We just learned it was caused by carfentanil, a synthetic opioid 10,000 times as powerful as morphine. Drugs on the streets are getting stronger, more addictive and more dangerous than ever. And it's not just carfentanil: Heroin – which is already cheap and extremely addictive – is increasingly laced with other synthetic opioids like fentanyl and U-44700 that can be 50 or even 100 times as powerful as heroin. [Link](#)

Heroin Epidemic's New Terror: Carfentanil (Rolling Stone 9/8)

This August, at least 96 heroin users overdosed in one devastating, brutal week in just one county in Ohio. It's believed that they were victims not only of their addictions to heroin, but of a synthetic opioid that some dealers are adding to the narcotic to give it an even more powerful – and completely deadly – kick: Carfentanil. [Link](#)