

**ATTENTION:**  
HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION  
AND STUDENT SUPPORT STAFF



**Fake pills connected with drug seizures and increased overdoses in S.C. pose risk to students, faculty, and staff**

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) urges university and college communities to warn students about the dangers of counterfeit pills and avoid pills sold on the street, obtained from a friend, or purchased online without a prescription.

**One fake pill can kill.** The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) [issued a public safety alert Sept. 27](#) on counterfeit pills that are made to look like real prescription opioid medications such as oxycodone (Oxycontin®, Percocet®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), and alprazolam (Xanax®); or stimulants like amphetamines (Adderall®). These fake pills are illegally manufactured and often sold online through social media and other platforms, making them easily accessible to anyone, including young adults. More than 9.5 million counterfeit pills were seized so far in 2021, which is more than the last two years combined.

**Counterfeit pills contain drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine in dangerous and often deadly amounts.** Individuals often report overdosing even after taking only half a pill. A deadly dose of fentanyl is two milligrams, which is small enough to fit on the tip of a pencil.

**Counterfeit pills are easily accessible – no campus community is immune.** Public safety and first responders in South Carolina have seen these pills connected with numerous drug seizures and increased overdoses. A few examples are highlighted:

- Fake orange pills made to look like Adderall® containing methamphetamine was seized in Richland County in Sept. 2021. USC police issued an alert about dangers of fake pills to the university community ([WLTx](#)).
- “Blue pills,” which look like 30 mg oxycodone (Roxicodone®), have been connected with more than 300 overdoses with EMS response in 2021. A higher percentage of these overdoses involve individuals ages 20-29 than is typically seen for EMS overdose response. Individuals often report overdosing even after taking only half a pill.

**Overdoses from counterfeit pills can be prevented.** DHEC issues a call to action to educate your campus on the dangers of fake pills and refer students at risk to treatment and recovery services. Prevention and response strategies you can take:

1. **Reinforce messages that the only safe medications are ones prescribed by a trusted medical professional and dispensed by a licensed pharmacist.** Never trust your own eyes to determine if a pill is legitimate. Taking medications that are not obtained from a pharmacy requiring a valid prescription, purchased from a local source that is not a pharmacy, or even taken from a family member or friend can be dangerous because

they may be pressed or fake, containing the wrong or other harmful ingredients. These pills can be particularly deadly when laced with fentanyl.

2. **Naloxone is effective for reversing an overdose that involves opioids such as fentanyl, heroin, or oxycodone from being deadly.** Share information about locations where Naloxone is available at no charge in the community, or consider becoming a community distributor. Host opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to learn how to administer Naloxone. Encourage residential housing and other staff who may witness an overdose to be trained and have naloxone on hand. Find locations near your campus at <http://justplainkillers.com/overdose-prevention/>

3. **Fentanyl test strips (FTS) can identify the presence of fentanyl in unregulated drugs.** Identifying the presence of fentanyl enables an individual to make informed choices that can include implementing behavioral strategies to reduce the risk of overdose. Many community distributors of Narcan® in South Carolina also distribute fentanyl test strips. To find out where to access fentanyl test strips, contact a local community distributor in your area. Find locations near your campus at <http://justplainkillers.com/overdose-prevention/>



4. **Services are available statewide for substance use, including medication assisted treatment, which is proven to be effective.** Refer individuals to campus or community services for treatment and recovery. The SC HOPES support line was established to provide residents with resources to deal with substance use or mental health challenges related to COVID-19. The statewide support line can be reached 24/7, toll-free, at 1 (844) SC-HOPES (724-6737). Callers will be connected with trained clinicians who can address their specific needs. Find more information about recovery and treatment options in South Carolina at: [www.embracerecoverysc.com](http://www.embracerecoverysc.com)



Examples of counterfeit pills that look authentic. From top to bottom: Oxycodone, Xanax®, Adderall®. Source: [DEA](https://www.dea.gov).

### Supportive resources:

1. Additional information on counterfeit pills from the DEA is available at <https://www.dea.gov/onepill>.
2. Find resources for campus drug misuse prevention from the DEA: <https://www.campusdrugprevention.gov/>.
3. For information on opioid overdose prevention, the opioid antidote Naloxone, finding a recovery provider, pain management and overdose data for South Carolina, visit [www.justplainkillers.com](http://www.justplainkillers.com).
4. Additional information about DHEC opioid prevention programs for community organizations is available at [www.scdhec.gov/opioid-epidemic](http://www.scdhec.gov/opioid-epidemic)