

FENTANYL ABUSE & PREVENTION

SUMMARY:

Fentanyl is a lethally potent, inexpensive drug that accounts for the largest rate of drug overdose deaths in the United States. Virginia is ranked by the CDC as one of nine states with a significant increase in drug overdoses for all ages. A lethal dose of fentanyl is small enough to fit on the tip of a pencil. Fentanyl cannot be identified in other drugs by sight, smell, or taste. As a result, many people are unaware of fentanyl's presence in drugs they are using which can lead to accidental overdose. Fake prescription pills are often sold on social media and ecommerce platforms increasing accessibility to anyone with a smartphone – including adolescents.

Urgent programs are needed to educate parents and students about fentanyl, expand access to drug use prevention programs, and increase awareness of how to identify and treat an overdose.

WHEREAS, Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid prescription drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use as an analgesic (pain relief) and anesthetic. Fentanyl is approximately 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin as an analgesic; and

WHEREAS, Illicitly Manufactured Fentanyl (IMF) is available in different forms, including liquid and powder. In its liquid form, fentanyl can be found in nasal sprays, eye drops, and dropped onto paper or small candies. In its powdered form, fentanyl may be mixed with drugs like heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine or made into pills that are intended to resemble other prescription opioids; and

WHEREAS, Fentanyl-laced drugs are extremely dangerous and an overdose can cause breathing to slow or stop resulting in hypoxia which can lead to a coma, permanent brain damage, and death; and

WHEREAS, Synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, are now the most common drugs involved in drug overdose deaths in the United States. Drug overdose deaths among adolescents (aged 10 – 19 yrs old) increased 109% from the end of 2019 to the end of 2021 with deaths involving illicitly manufactured fentanyl increasing 182% and deaths involving counterfeit pills present in 25% of adolescent deaths; and

WHEREAS, Many overdoses have occurred because people did not know that what they were taking was contaminated with fentanyl and additionally, two-thirds of drug overdoses had one or more potential bystanders present, but most provided no overdose response; and

WHEREAS, Naloxone is a medicine that can temporarily treat a fentanyl overdose when given right away allowing time for medical help to arrive;

THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations support funding and implementation of evidence-based comprehensive substance use education, prevention and early intervention programs that are differentiated for and accessible to all learners and which include community stakeholders in developing locally effective programs and which expand access to mental health counseling and substance abuse treatment; and be it further,

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations support school staffing requirements for substance abuse counselors and educating adolescents about the dangers of illicit manufactured fentanyl and counterfeit pills, and how to identify and respond to an overdose; and be it further,

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations support all schools having a supply of naloxone and training school staff and bus drivers in overdose recognition and response; and be it further,

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations support drug-checking programs that include harm reduction counseling, health education, and substance abuse treatment; and be it further,

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations support partnering with local agencies and community groups to expand distribution of educational materials, naloxone, fentanyl test strips, drug deactivation & disposal kits, drug lockboxes, and other items that may prevent access to drugs by youth.

APPROVED May 20, 2023 at the Virginia PTA Annual Meeting