Intertwined Epidemics of Illicitly Manufactured Fentanyl in Canada and the United States

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Illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF)

- Acetyl fentanyl and other analogues,
- 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine
- Blood tests do not distinguish from pharma-fentanyl
- Linked to the larger opioid epidemics in the US and Canada, and to ER visits and overdose deaths
- IMF powder has been found laced with heroin, cocaine and synthetic marijuana
- IMF has been found in counterfeit opioid and sedative medications

Pill press plus 1K NPF = $100,000
Street value = $20,000,000
Methods

The Drug Diversion Program of the RADARS ® prescription drug surveillance system conducts quarterly surveys of 250 law enforcement agencies.

Surveys questions include:

- Number of new cases of pharmaceutical drug diversion by product
- Open-ended query about new drug trends in the reporter’s jurisdiction

Data were compiled from the new drug trends section for the period 1/1/2013 through 3/31/2016. Maps were created to signify reports of IMF in both powder and counterfeit pill forms over time.

Law enforcement and public health news reports were researched to compile the history of IMF distribution in Canada.
2012: New IMF Trafficking through Canada

High volume Chinese trade through Vancouver
No searches of parcels under 30 grams in weight
Distant from Mexico heroin sources
Conclusion

- Canada and US have different but complementary drug trafficking routes

- Illicit drug trade adapts to Rx opioid misuse trends and control measures

- Most worrisome:
  - high potency illicit fentanyl analogues are easily camouflaged and transported
  - mass produced counterfeit Rx products
Public health policy issues

- Law enforcement reports of Rx diversion and illicit drug seizures are an early warning system for the public health system.

- The systematic surveillance data in the U.S. signaled the entry of IMF into the US six months before public health notices.

- Also needed:
  - International cooperation Prevention measures targeted to young people
  - Pain management treatments that work
  - Treatments with low abuse liability
  - Access to opioids for patients that need them
  - Drug treatment access
  - Harm reduction, including needle exchange, safe injection sites, and OD reversal