



# FENTANYL & OPIOIDS

ATTORNEY GENERAL LIZ MURRILL

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE



# A MESSAGE FROM



**Attorney General  
Liz Murrill**

*Liz Murrill*

## **A focus on prevention.**

The opioid crisis was declared by the CDC in 2011, but as you'll see over the following pages, this problem began much earlier. Still, communities across the country (and our State) remain in a struggle with addiction as the rise of fentanyl decimates our major cities and rural towns.

The goal of this pamphlet is to educate you on the history of this epidemic, as well as the actions the Louisiana Department of Justice has taken to support victims and their families. We've also included guidance on how to dispose of medications, source Naloxone, and respond to an overdose. However, the best course of action is prevention, which we hope this guide helps you achieve.



## A BRIEF HISTORY

On January 10, 1980, *The New England Journal of Medicine* published a letter claiming that prescription opioids rarely lead to addiction. It would go on to be “heavily” and “uncritically” cited to support the prescription practices that followed --especially in the case of Purdue Pharma’s “miracle drug” OxyContin, which was released in 1995. Today, there are more opioid prescriptions than people in Louisiana, and it is estimated that 120 Americans die *every day* from an overdose (a rate that has tripled since 1999). Sadly, prescription opioids were just the beginning, and that letter ultimately paved the way for something worse.

# THE HISTORY

Sales of OxyContin targeted blue collar workers susceptible to work-related injuries, while physicians were led to believe that these time-released doses of oxycodone -- a cousin of heroine twice as powerful as morphine -- could be used to treat everything from serious spinal injuries to a simple headache. Sales reps even went so far to say that “fewer than 1% of patients who took OxyContin became addicted.”

Unfortunately, this was blatantly untrue, proven by the enormous surge of addiction that brought with it a crime way of armed robbery, violence, prostitution, and theft. Both job and child abandonment rates increased while sales of OxyContin soon outpaced those of Viagra. By 2011 -- sixteen years after the product was released -- the CDC had declared an opioid epidemic in America.

However, that did not stop the production of other pain relievers, as the demand continued to grow. Fentanyl, which is 50 to 100 times more powerful than morphine, soon became a household name. And now opioids account for 69% of drug overdose deaths, a rate that has doubled since 2010.

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Synthetic opioids soon entered the market, even though they were far stronger and more dangerous than the drugs available a mere decade earlier. And even though physicians stopped prescribing opioids as they had in the past, the spread of addiction continued. In fact, roughly 60% of addicts start their addiction with someone else's prescription, while four out of five heroin users can trace their addiction back to prescription drugs.

Unfortunately, Louisiana ranks in the top 10 for overdose deaths and no community is immune, from our big cities to rural towns. And the impact of addiction and overdose deaths have stretched Louisiana's resources in terms of healthcare, criminal justice, child welfare, and even productivity. Families have been torn apart, relationships damaged, and children harmed while the social fabric holding us together has eroded.

And all of this has been made significantly worse by the abundance of fentanyl.

## THE FENTANYL PROBLEM

In 2020, only 7% of blood samples brought to the Louisiana State Police Crime Lab had traces of fentanyl. By 2022, the drug was found in 23% of samples. Today it is estimated that 1 in 5 people arrested for a DWI have fentanyl in their system, while teenagers and college students are often deceived by counterfeit pharmaceuticals containing a deadly dose of this insidious substance. And while relapse for opioid addicts may have been part of their recovery, now it is a death sentence.

Today, hundreds of thousands of Americans are dying, injured, or brain dead because of fentanyl. Families, lives, and entire communities have been destroyed. And the only way to stop this crisis is to enforce our immigration laws.

Drug trafficking is big business and fentanyl is its ingenious product. In the past, drug cartels based in Mexico have focused on heroin and cocaine; however, those products are dependent on soil quality and weather patterns. They also happen to be difficult to move across the border.

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But a single package of fentanyl can be carried across the border in packages the size of a small, orange pharmaceutical bottle around two and a half inches high and slightly more than an inch wide. That amount of fentanyl can kill thousands of people, with a slight dusting on a penny being enough to cause a lethal overdose.

To make matters even worse, fentanyl is water soluble, meaning it can be hidden in water bottles while crossing the border. Once a migrant has entered the country, the same method for sourcing sea salt can be used to evaporate the water and collect pure fentanyl, which can then be packaged, sold, and distributed across American communities.

Cartels have also exploited the surge of illegal immigrants by offering to waive smuggling fees in exchange for carrying fentanyl across the border. In 2020, it was estimated that the DEA intercepted roughly 5% of illegal drugs coming into the United States. Now, it's probably less than 1%. This has created billions in profits for the cartels during a time when Americans are most vulnerable.



Fentanyl poisoning is now the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45. More than 72,000 Americans died as a result of fentanyl overdoses in 2022, and this particular crisis cost American taxpayers nearly \$1.5 trillion in 2020 alone - - with the states responsible for a large portion of that cost.

In response, Louisiana, among other states, recently amended the second degree murder statute to hold drug dealers responsible when the drugs they sell kill. In 2023, a jury in Louisiana found one fentanyl dealer guilty of Second Degree Murder. Yet the root problem remains an open border that is responsible for the flow of fentanyl from China and Mexico into the hands of street dealers across the country -- and the situation is only getting worse.

For example, fentanyl-related deaths of toddlers are on the rise, while a single parish (out of sixty-four) has logged about 300 overdose deaths annually since 2021. We've even seen a rise in fentanyl deaths within the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, where inmates receive letters from home containing stamps dipped in fentanyl water.

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These are the problems we currently face when it comes to the original opioid epidemic and the latest problem of fentanyl being mainlined into our country. Of course, our office has done everything in its power to try to reduce the damage, if not prevent it within our borders.

In terms of the opioid crisis, we co-created EndTheEpidemic.org to educate on the dangers of opioids and counterfeit drugs. Then we collaborated with law enforcement to ensure that drug take-back boxes were available across our State. We also leveraged a legal settlement to provide our first responders with free vouchers for Naloxone. And we pushed Congress to repeal the shielding of manufacturers and distributors from accountability.

Our Consumer Protection Division reached a settlement with the consulting firm who advised Purdue Pharma on how to maximize their profits by targeting high-volume prescribers, encouraging doctors to increase prescriptions, and circumventing pharmacy restrictions. When states began to sue Purdue, the firm advised deleting documents to hide the truth; yet in

collaboration with 47 other states, we held them accountable.

Furthermore, our office led negotiations alongside other attorneys general to reach an historic agreement with CVS and Walgreens for their role in the crisis, resulting in \$10.7 billion in opioid relief funds to be paid over the next decade. Monies will be allocated to local governments and parishes and used to remediate this crisis, from prevention and harm reduction to treatment and recovery services.

Unfortunately, after Purdue reformulated OxyContin to reduce drug abuse -- namely by preventing abusers from snorting and injecting the ground up pill -- addicts turned to heroin and then fentanyl. This created a new market for drug cartels in Mexico, who have since abused our border crisis to further feed crime, drug addiction, and overdose deaths in our communities.

That is why, for the past eight years, in her role as the State's Solicitor General, Liz Murrill did everything in her power to

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secure the border, mitigate a humanitarian crisis and its impact on our State, and ensure our public safety. Our office led twenty states in a petition to Congress to support U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) when there were calls to abolish the agency. We fought unlawful efforts to bypass the statutory via process, battled to maintain Title 42 to prevent the expected tsunami of illegal aliens staged in Mexico to rush across our border, and labored to ensure that government benefits are not abused.

Sadly, none of that offers much comfort to those who have lost their loved ones to the opioid crisis. No law, policy, or lawsuit will ever bring their family members back from a fatal overdose. But what we can do is prevent someone else from succumbing to this horrible situation, and that is what our office is fighting for every single day.



**WAYS TO  
PROTECT  
YOURSELF**

# 01 DISPOSING OF PHARMACEUTICALS

If you are unable to source a drug activation pouch in your area, there are still ways to safely dispose of unwanted pharmaceuticals.

First, please note that you should never flush pharmaceutical products down the toilet or pour similar liquids down the drain. This can pollute our water, contaminate our food, and harm our communities.

Instead, we recommend that you mix your medications with an inedible substance, such as dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds, within a plastic

bag or container. You do not need to crush or powder tablets or capsules to accomplish this. From there, simply dispose of the sealed container as you would any other waste. At the same time, you should also remove any personal information from empty pill bottles or packaging before throwing away.

The best option, however, is to find your nearest drop box. The Louisiana Department of Justice partnered with Blue Cross, the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators and local law enforcement agencies to ensure that this was available across the State.



## Find Your Drop Box

For a location list and map of available drop boxes across Louisiana, please visit:

[www.bcbsla.com/safedrugdrop](http://www.bcbsla.com/safedrugdrop)

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## SOURCING NALOXONE

Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can reverse an opioid overdose; but you need to think ahead in order to have this medication on-hand during an emergency.

Within the State of Louisiana, there are several options for sourcing Naloxone. For example, our State has syringe services programs that offer the medication in both Alexandria and New Orleans. There are also community-based programs available across the State. Ask your local hospital or law enforcement agency for additional information.



The majority of local pharmacies will provide Naloxone without a prescription, while those on Medicaid can source the medication for free at most pharmacies. If you would like to establish a standing order, visit <https://ldh.la.gov/subhome/54>.

But please keep in mind that while Naloxone may work to reverse an overdose the first time, it should not be used as a countermeasure to repeated overdoses. It is not a medication that should be abused alongside opioids and other addictive substances.



### Additional Resources

For more information on Naloxone, as well as Opioid Addiction, please visit:

<https://ldh.la.gov/subhome/54>

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## RESPONDING TO AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

Signs of an opioid overdose include small, constricted “pinpoint” pupils, a loss of consciousness, slow or weak breathing, choking or gurgling sounds, cold/clammy skin, and a limp body. Also look for discolored skin, especially with lips and nails. If someone is exhibiting these symptoms, call 911 immediately for help.

At a bare minimum, try to keep the individual awake. Check their pulse and breathing regularly, lay them on their side to prevent choking, and stay with them until emergency assistance arrives.

If Naloxone is available, check to see if it is injectable or a nasal spray. If injectable, fill the syringe with all liquid in the dram, being sure to remove any air from the syringe before injecting. Keep in mind that it is okay to inject through clothing as you inject the needle either into the upper arm or front of the thigh. Empty the syringe, then wait 2-3 minutes. If the individual remains unresponsive, administer an additional dose.

If using the nasal spray, tilt the individual's head back, place the tip of the spray into either nostril until your fingers are touching their nose, then firmly press the plunger to release the entire dose of medication. Wait 2-3 minutes. If they remain unresponsive, administer an additional dose.



## Ways to Protect Yourself from Fentanyl Poisoning:

1. Don't buy counterfeit drugs
2. Avoid drug paraphernalia
3. Walk away from smoke
4. Do not clean suspicious surfaces
5. Always buy pharmaceuticals from a reputable pharmacy

## ABOUT THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

If you are seeking justice for yourself in a personal, corporate, or family matter, you try to get the best legal representation. But if an entire State or its political subdivisions are injured or victimized by the federal government, a multi-national corporation, or even another State -- that requires an Attorney General.

The Office of the Attorney General *is* the Louisiana Department of Justice, and we work to protect the people of Louisiana as whole. We fight for Louisiana's natural resources, investigate fraud, secure justice for our most vulnerable, and so much more.

We also provide educational content meant to help you make wise choices based on guidance you can trust. With that in mind, we hope this guide has been enlightening and instructive; but should you need more information, please feel free to reach out to our office or your local parish representative.

ABOUT  
ATTORNEY GENERAL  
LIZ MURRILL



AG Liz Murrill is committed to defending the rule of law and protecting the people of our State. She has argued multiple cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and served as lead counsel in many cases challenging federal overreach, ranging from open border policies and attacks on religious liberty to COVID-19 mandates and First Amendment violations. With more than 30 years experience working in state and federal government, including eight as Louisiana's first Solicitor General, Liz Murrill has been a champion for women, children, and victims demanding justice. Now she is leading the fight to preserve our rights, our industries, and Louisiana's unique way of life. You can learn more at [www.AGLizMurrill.com](http://www.AGLizMurrill.com).



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