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FOUR STATE AGENCY LEADERS CALL FOR INCREASED AWARENESS ABOUT FENTANYL Deadly, Illegally Sold and Often Cheap Drug Cited by CDC in Alert Update Issued Last Week

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Following a public health alert update last week from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on increased risk of overdose and fatalities associated with Fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills and compounds, commissioners and directors from four Tennessee departments are urging the public to have increased awareness about the substance. They include:

- John J. Dreyzehner, MD, MPH, Commissioner, Tennessee Dept. of Health
- E. Doug Varney, Commissioner, Tenn. Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- Mark Gwyn, Director, Tenn. Bureau of Investigation
- David Purkey, Assistant Commissioner, Tenn. Dept. of Safety & Homeland Security

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid estimated by the CDC to be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine and has been used for treating severe pain. Available initially in transdermal patches or lozenges for cancer patients, it is now being manufactured and sold illegally. Tennesseans should know:

- Fentanyl is often mixed with heroin, cocaine or other drugs to increase the euphoric effects of those drugs.
- It is used to produce cheap counterfeits of Oxycodone, Xanax and Norco.
- It can be sold as counterfeit heroin.
- It can be inhaled, swallowed, injected, absorbed through skin contact or passed along in a vaporized form.
- It affects the central nervous system and respiratory functions; in overdoses, a victim loses the ability to breathe and can die if emergency care is not provided.

“The CDC alert follows a report from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in July indicating hundreds of thousands of counterfeit pills have been entering the U.S. drug market since 2014, with some containing fentanyl,” said TDH Commissioner Dreyzehner. “Fentanyl is deadly and those who are using or selling it illegally are now at real risk of killing themselves or others; we strongly encourage Tennesseans with substance use disorders to recognize the importance of avoiding drugs from illegal sources and to seek help now to end a dependency. Tomorrow may be too late.”

To see CDC information on fentanyl, visit: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00384.asp>

“More and more we are seeing drugs being made in clandestine labs that contain fentanyl,” said TBI Director Mark Gwyn. “The public needs to understand these drugs present a life-threatening danger to those who use them; they are also a threat to police and EMS first responders who are called upon to aid overdose victims or who are working to remove them from communities across our state. The counterfeiters producing very real-looking imitations of legitimate pain relief drugs don’t emphasize quality control in their manufacturing, so one fake pill may be more deadly than another. Anyone with knowledge of fake pills being sold in any community should immediately contact local law enforcement. One call might save one life – or many.”

“This situation is alarming,” Department of Safety and Homeland Security Assistant Commissioner David Purkey said. “Our state is vulnerable to the dangerous influx of drugs that are threatening our Tennessee communities. The Tennessee Highway Patrol is working overtime to interdict the drug traffickers who are wanting to impose harm on the citizens in our great state and across the country. We will continue to combat drug trafficking and ensure the safety of all Tennesseans.”

“Although we have made great strides against the prescription opioid epidemic facing our State, I am gravely concerned about the growing number of counterfeit pills containing lethal doses of fentanyl entering our State,” said Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner E. Douglas Varney. “If you or someone you know is struggling with opioid dependence, please contact the Tennessee **REDLINE** (1-800-889-9789) to seek help now.”

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Health is to protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of people in Tennessee. TDH has facilities in all 95 counties and provides direct services for more than one in five Tennesseans annually as well as indirect services for everyone in the state, including emergency response to health threats, licensure of health professionals, regulation of health care facilities and inspection of food service establishments. Learn more about TDH services and programs at www.tn.gov/health.

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