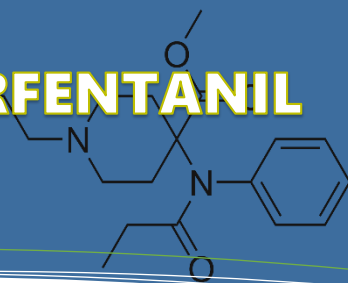





PUBLIC SAFETY ALERT: CARFENTANIL

SEPTEMBER 2025



Carfentanil found in El Paso County, Colorado

An individual who died in Colorado Springs, CO in August of 2025 was found to be in possession of several blue M30 pills (pictured below). Pills with an  stamp on the front and "30" on the back almost always contain illicitly-manufactured fentanyl and have been pressed to look like prescription 30mg oxycodone tablets. These pills can come in many different colors but are typically blue. However, analysis of one of these pills by the El Paso County Coroner's Office showed that it contained acetaminophen, metamizole, and carfentanil, but no fentanyl was detected.

Analysis of the decedent's blood samples during post-mortem toxicological testing showed the presence of acetaminophen and carfentanil but not fentanyl, coinciding with the make-up of this M30 pill. This is the first time, to our knowledge, that carfentanil has been discovered in our community in the absence of fentanyl.



Recently, carfentanil has made a comeback to the illicit drug market. Due to its significant structural difference from fentanyl, carfentanil does not react with most immunoassays or fentanyl test strips, potentially producing a "false negative" result. Only if fentanyl is present alongside the carfentanil would the test show as "positive".

Awareness of this new trend is important for everyone in our community – from responding and testing personnel (hospitals, correctional facilities, law enforcement, etc.) to people trying to avoid fentanyl exposure, and from recreational users to bystanders who may witness an overdose. As detailed in the sidebar, carfentanil is many times more potent than fentanyl.

Symptoms of carfentanil toxicity are similar to those of other opioids. Though carfentanil overdose can be reversed with the opioid antagonist naloxone (Narcan®), a much higher dose may be necessary compared to other opioids like fentanyl or heroin.

References:

- "Carfentanil: A Synthetic Opioid Unlike Any Other." DEA Headquarters, May 14, 2025. <https://www.dea.gov/stories/2025/2025-05/2025-05-14/carfentanil-synthetic-opioid-unlike-any-other>
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- Norman, Caitlyn, et al. "Evaluation of fentanyl immunoassay test strips for rapid in-situ detection of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs in seized samples and alternative matrices." International Journal of Drug Policy, August 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2023.104102>
- Guerrieri, Davide, et al. "Validation and Cross-Reactivity Data for Fentanyl Analogs with the Immunolysis Fentanyl ELISA." Journal of Analytical Toxicology, September 12, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jat/bky060>

BREAKING DOWN THE PILL :

WHAT IS CARFENTANIL?

Carfentanil is a powerful synthetic opioid and an analog of fentanyl. It is used in veterinary medicine to sedate large animals like elephants.

It is 100 times more potent than fentanyl and 10,000 times more potent than morphine.

WHAT IS METAMIZOLE?

Metamizole (also known as dipyrone) is a pain reliever that is also used to treat muscle spasms and fever.

The FDA withdrew it from the US market in the 1970s due to its risk of adverse side effects, but it is still widely used in other countries including Mexico, Russia, China, Germany, and much of South America.

It is commonly used as an adulterant in illicitly manufactured drugs.

WHAT IS ACETAMINOPHEN?

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) has historically been added to opioid drugs in order to enhance their pain-relieving effects.

Due to it being a cheap and readily available drug, it is commonly used as a cutting agent in illicitly manufactured drugs.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF TOXICITY:

- Slowed or stopped breathing
- Snoring or gurgling sounds
- Pinpoint pupils
- Cold, clammy skin
- Drowsiness
- Disorientation
- Sedation
- Unresponsiveness