



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

September 20, 2022

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Dear Agency Heads:

As you know, our nation is facing a fentanyl crisis. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50–100 times more potent than morphine, often proving lethal with as little as 2 milligrams. Over 71,000 Americans died from fentanyl in 2021, an increase of 23 percent from the previous year. Over that same period, Texas saw an 89 percent increase in fentanyl-related deaths, with provisional data showing 1,672 such tragedies in 2021, compared to 883 of them in 2020. These are steep increases since 2018, when there were 214 fentanyl-related deaths in Texas.

Mr. Mike H. Morath, Colonel Steven C. McCraw, Ms. Cecile Young, Dr. John Hellerstedt,  
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It has become clear that fentanyl is impacting individuals with and without substance use disorders. Unfortunately, most individuals who suffer a fentanyl-related death probably did not know they were ingesting the deadly drug. Many of those who were poisoned unwittingly ingested deadly counterfeits that appeared to be prescription drugs, which were acquired outside of the healthcare system. Most fentanyl in Texas is produced by Mexican drug cartels that combine fentanyl with other drugs. Many of those drugs look like and are marketed by drug traffickers as legitimate prescription painkillers, stimulants, or anti-anxiety drugs. Even more devious is “rainbow fentanyl,” which is made to look like candy so it can be marketed to children. Simply put, fentanyl is a clandestine killer, and Texans are falling victim to the cartels that are producing it.

Due to the threats posed by an open border and in the absence of federal action, I initiated Operation Lone Star on March 4, 2021. Since that time, the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) has seized more than 336 *million* lethal doses of fentanyl across the state. That is enough fentanyl to kill every man, woman, and child in the United States. The efforts of DPS are noteworthy and commendable, but law enforcement alone cannot be expected to end this crisis.

Fentanyl’s potency and deceptiveness, combined with the federal government’s unwillingness to take border security seriously, pose a grave threat to Texans. We must take all appropriate actions to inform Texans of this danger and prevent additional deaths. To this end, I am directing each of your agencies to inform the populations you serve of fentanyl’s lethality and prevalence. Actions could include, but are not limited to, developing public service announcements, posting flyers in prominent locations around regulated facilities, training staff, or providing educational opportunities to the people you serve.

Furthermore, the state must also look for ways to enhance all aspects of the state’s response to this crisis. As the Texas Legislature prepares to meet in January 2023, agencies should be prepared to outline statutory changes, budget priorities, and other initiatives that will enhance the state’s ability to interdict this dangerous drug, provide emergency overdose treatment, and expand substance abuse treatment programs. These agency efforts can be amplified by strategic coordination with the Texas Opioid Abatement Fund Council. I appreciate Comptroller Glen Hegar for inviting many of you to the next council meeting to present your current efforts to protect Texans from controlled substances.

Thank you for the work you and your colleagues do, and thank you for taking this issue seriously. Together we can help bring awareness to the threat posed by fentanyl and do our part to address this crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Abbott  
Governor  
GA:shd

cc: Comptroller Glen Hegar