

DEA warns powerful new synthetic opioid 'cychlorphine' has reached Northern California

by Emma Underwood

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FILE - DEA Agent. (Photo by Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images)

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HUMBOLDT, Calif — A newly emerging synthetic opioid believed to be more potent than fentanyl has been identified in Northern California, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) San Francisco Field Division.

Bob Beris, Special Agent in Charge of DEA's San Francisco Field Division, confirmed the drug, known as cychlorphine, has already been detected in two samples locally as authorities track its spread across the country. Cychlorphine is part of a growing group of laboratory-made opioids entering the illegal drug supply nationwide. The substance has no approved medical use and is not regulated for prescription purposes.

Beris said cychlorphine belongs to an emerging category of synthetic opioids known as "orphines." These drugs were originally developed decades ago during pharmaceutical research but were never approved for clinical use.

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Federal drug laboratories first identified cychlorphine in April 2024 in Florida. Since then, Beris said, the DEA has documented 35 samples nationwide as testing continues to expand.

Health officials in Tennessee have already linked cychlorphine to multiple overdose deaths, prompting public safety warnings there. Toxicology laboratories have also detected the drug in

Early research suggests cychlorphine may be more potent than fentanyl, which is already the leading driver of overdose deaths in the United States.

Beris said the drug can appear in many forms, including counterfeit prescription pills and powders that resemble other substances.

“It could be mixed into anything,” Beris said. “It could be put into a blue counterfeit oxycodone pill or a counterfeit Xanax pill. It could be sold as a powder or mixed with or resemble cocaine.”

The two Northern California samples identified so far were found in counterfeit “M-30” oxycodone-style pills. However, Beris cautioned that does not mean the drug is limited to that form.

“Just because that’s what we’ve found right now doesn’t mean it’s not out there in other forms or that there isn’t more of it,” Beris said.

Beris also warned that commonly used fentanyl test strips may not detect cychlorphine.

“If someone has one of those fentanyl or nitazene strips and they test a pill they bought on Instagram, it may not test positive, but it could contain cychlorphine,” Beris said. “It’s a game of Russian roulette. Anything you buy on Instagram or any street drug you buy — you don’t know what you’re getting.”

Beris said researchers are still working to understand how the opioid reversal medication naloxone interacts with cychlorphine overdoses. While naloxone is designed to reverse synthetic opioid poisoning, limited data leaves uncertainty about its effectiveness against this new drug. Because of that, Beris emphasized calling emergency services immediately if someone shows signs of an overdose rather than relying solely on naloxone.

Beris said the safest protection is avoiding counterfeit or non-prescribed medications entirely.

“The only safe pill you get is one prescribed to you by a trusted doctor and filled at a trusted pharmacy,” Beris said.

As part of those efforts, Beris encouraged people to safely dispose of unused medications during the DEA's National Prescription Drug Take Back Day on April 25. The event includes thousands of disposal locations nationwide, including dozens across Northern California.

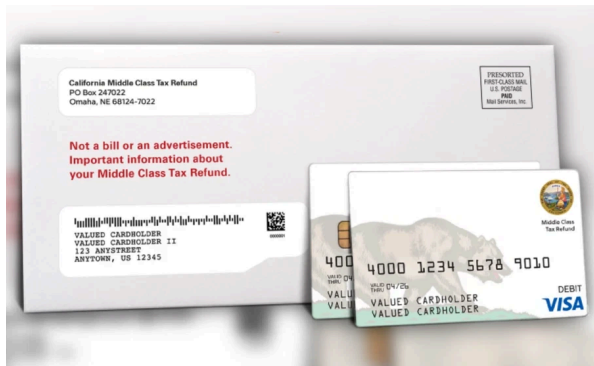
Removing unused medications from homes helps prevent misuse and reduces the likelihood they end up in the illegal drug supply.

"In order to reduce addiction, we can reduce demand," Beris said. "The goal is to save lives."

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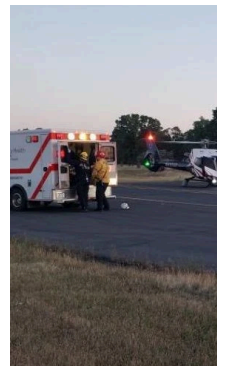
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