

SOCIAL MEDIA Drug Trafficking Threat

WHAT WE KNOW

With the growth of social media and the proliferation of smartphones, a dangerous and deadly new drug threat has emerged: **criminal drug networks are abusing social media to expand their reach, create new markets, and target new clientele.** This includes by selling deadly fake fentanyl and methamphetamine pills, often to unsuspecting teenagers, young adults, and older Americans, who think they are buying the real thing.

No longer confined to street corners and the dark web, criminal drug networks are now in every home and school in America because of the internet apps on our smartphones.

HOW IT WORKS

ONE-STOP SHOP

Drug traffickers have turned smartphones into a one-stop shop to market, sell, buy, and deliver deadly, fake prescription pills and other dangerous drugs. In just three steps, deadly drugs can be purchased and delivered to your home just like any other good or service.

1. Advertise

Drug traffickers advertise on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube. These advertisements are in disappearing, 24-hour stories and in posts, which are promptly posted and removed. Posts and stories are often accompanied by known code words and emojis that are used to market and sell illicit and deadly drugs on social media. These code words and emojis are designed to evade detection by law enforcement and by the preset algorithms used by social media platforms.



ADVERTISE

COMMON EMOJI CODES

FAKE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

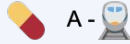
PERCOCET & OXYCODONE



XANAX



ADDERALL



OTHER DRUGS

METH



HEROIN



COCAINE



MDMA & MOLLIES



MUSHROOMS



COUGH SYRUP



MARIJUANA



DEALER SIGNALS

DEALER ADVERTISING



HIGH POTENCY



UNIVERSAL FOR DRUGS



LARGE BATCH



Disclaimer: These emojis reflect common examples found in DEA investigations. This list is not all-inclusive, and the images above are a representative sample.

2. Connect

Prospective buyers contact drug traffickers on social media apps in response to their advertisements – either using direct messaging or by commenting on a post. Once contact is made, drug traffickers and potential buyers often move to an encrypted communications app like WhatsApp, Signal, and Telegram. Drug traffickers typically switch to these encrypted communications apps to arrange drug deals with prospective buyers.

3. Pay

After a deal is made, drug traffickers request payment using one-click apps like Venmo, Zelle, Cash App, and Remitly.

CONNECT



& PAY

WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

DEA has directly connected social media drug sales to overdose deaths.

DEA has found drug trafficking on internet apps nationwide — across urban, suburban, and rural communities. In 2021, DEA has investigated more than 80 cases involving drug trafficking on internet apps.



Social media drug trafficking impacts all age groups, but adolescents and young adults are particularly susceptible given their high-rates of social media usage.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- 1 Stay vigilant and aware of the drug trafficking threats on smartphone apps.
- 2 Know the dangers of counterfeit pills: their accessibility, availability and increasing lethality.
- 3 Share message the message that One Pill Can Kill.
- 4 Visit [DEA.Gov/onepill](https://deagov.gov/onepill) to learn more.