

STEP 1 : Fentanyl and the U.S. Opioid Epidemic (B1/B2)

Opioid¹ addiction has become one of the United States' biggest killers, endangering public health, the economy, and national security.

Summary

- Since 2000, more than a million people in the United States have died of drug overdoses, the majority of which were due to opioids.
- Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids have been driving the crisis in recent years, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating² the public's abuse of the drug.
- The crisis has also become a major U.S. foreign policy issue, with most supply coming from China and Mexico.

Introduction

Fentanyl and other opioids are fueling the worst drug crisis in the history of the United States. More than 1,500 Americans per week die from taking some type of opioid, making the drug by far the leading cause of fatal overdoses in the country. In recent years, the crisis has become defined by illicit fentanyl, an extremely lethal synthetic opioid. Illegal fentanyl supplies are largely produced in China and Mexico and then smuggled³ into the United States.

Analysts say the opioid epidemic started with the overprescription of legal pain medications in the 1990s, but it has intensified in recent years due to influxes⁴ of cheap heroin, fentanyl, and other synthetic opioids supplied by foreign drug cartels. The crisis has become a scourge⁵ on the economy, a threat⁶ to national security, and a major foreign policy challenge.

¹ a compound resembling opium in addictive properties or physiological effects

² = increasing

³ to smuggle [sth] = move (goods) illegally into or out of a country

⁴ an arrival or entry of large numbers of people or things

⁵ a person or thing that causes great trouble or suffering

⁶ = a menace

20 **What drugs are contributing to the crisis?**

Opioids, a class of drugs derived from the opium poppy plant⁷, can be divided into two broad categories: legally manufactured medications and illicit narcotics. Opioid medications, including oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, and fentanyl, are often prescribed to treat severe pain, while methadone is primarily used in addiction treatment centers.

25 **What is the scale⁸ of the epidemic?**

Overdoses involving synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl, are the leading cause of U.S. deaths in people ages eighteen to forty-five. In 2021, the overall death toll⁹ surged¹⁰ to 80,411, more than ten times the number of U.S. military service members killed in the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A study by researchers at the Mayo Clinic and Yale University found that deaths from fentanyl alone nearly tripled from 2016 to 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the opioid epidemic. Disruptions¹¹ to supply chains forced people to turn to drugs they were less familiar with, and social-distancing measures led more people to take drugs alone, which brings a greater risk of overdosing, analysts say.

Fentanyl's extreme potency also makes the drug more addictive and more deadly, further fueling the crisis. A lethal dose requires just two milligrams of the drug—an amount roughly equivalent to ten to fifteen grains of table salt.

What are the demographics¹² of the opioid crisis?

Among U.S. drug overdose deaths in 2021, fentanyl was the top killer for all regions of the country and all age, race, and ethnic groups. Still, it hit some harder than others—American Indian and Alaska Native people, Black people, younger adults, and men died from fentanyl-linked overdoses at higher rates.

Another concerning trend is the rise of fentanyl deaths in youths between ten and nineteen years old. Fatal fentanyl overdoses nearly doubled in teens between 2019 to 2021.

⁷ coquelicot

⁸ l'échelle

⁹ = total number of deaths

¹⁰ = to increase forcefully

¹¹ = interruption

¹² statistical data relating to the population and particular groups within it

What are the economic consequences?

45 The opioid epidemic is taking a heavy toll¹³ on the U.S. economy, according to many reports. The
U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee (JEC) found that the opioid epidemic cost the United
States nearly \$1.5 trillion in 2020, or 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)¹⁴ that year, an
increase of about one-third since the cost was last measured in 2017. This massive sum includes
the price of health care to treat overdoses, the costs of fighting fentanyl trafficking and pursuing
50 criminal justice efforts, and lost productivity in the workforce, as well as the economic costs of
human lives lost to overdose and the reduced value of life for overdose survivors.

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Adapted from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/fentanyl-and-us-opioid-epidemic>

¹³ = big consequences

¹⁴ PIB (produit intérieur brut)

Questions

- **Instruction** : Read the document and answer the questions below. Answer the first 5 questions and compare your answers with another classmate who is done too. Then, answer question n°6 and wait for all the classmates who have chosen the same section as you to gather up and exchange about it.

From the title to line 24

1. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **This drug epidemic has a very small impact on the American population.**

☐ True

☐ False

Quote two elements from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

.....

.....

2. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **Street Fentanyl is mostly produced in America.**

☐ True

☐ False

Quote one element from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

.....

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3. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **This specific drug epidemic started because doctors prescribed opioids way too much in the past.**

☐ True

☐ False

Quote one element from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

.....

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4. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **The COVID-19 pandemic has made the street Fentanyl epidemic even worse.**

☐ True

☐ False

Quote one element from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

.....

.....

5. Prove that the following statement is wrong (you can quote from the text and give examples of medications) : **Opioids are totally illegal in the US.**

Write complete sentences and use linking words/expressions.

B2 : Nuance your point if you can.

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6. Pick one of the three tasks below (depending on your level).

1. " What is the scale of the epidemic ? " – LEVEL : ■ ■ ■

- **Instruction** : Read this section and make a simple summary for the class. You may quote from the text, but you have to write this summary in your own words. You will give an account of this section in front of the other students.

2. " What are the demographics of the opioid crisis ? " – LEVEL : ■ □ □

- **Instruction** : Read this section and make a simple summary for the class. You may quote from the text, but you have to write this summary in your own words. You will give an account of this section in front of the other students.

3. " What are the economic consequences ? " – LEVEL : ■ ■ □

- **Instruction** : Read this section and make a simple summary for the class. You may quote from the text, but you have to write this summary in your own words. You will give an account of this section in front of the other students.

La partie orale de la question n°6 est une note facultative bonifiante (elle ne peut pas baisser votre moyenne). Consultez le barème ci-dessous.

Barème prises de parole en classe [x 0,5]

• Contenu de la leçon :	
- Apporter la bonne réponse à la question posée / présenter le point adéquat du cours étudié (selon le niveau de langue de chacun).	1
<i>Bonus</i> : Être particulièrement explicite dans sa réponse, pour l'aisance de tout le groupe.	
• Maintenir la conversation exclusivement en anglais à hauteur de ses capacités. -- <i>Bonus</i> : Utiliser des gap fillers.	0,5
• Précision linguistique :	
- Efforts (visibles) pour intégrer le vocabulaire / les prononciations / les structures grammaticales de la leçon avec succès.	1
<i>Bonus</i> : Efforts particuliers pour toujours tenter de complexifier l'énoncé formulé, quitte à se tromper.	
• Parler avec fluidité à hauteur de ses capacités.	0,5
• Qualités d'orateur/oratrice :	
- Se détacher de ses notes (pour expliquer réellement plutôt que lire).	1
- Regarder le public quand on parle (et pas que le professeur), utiliser ses mains pour montrer ou mieux expliquer.	0,5
- Parler fort et articuler.	0,5

Answers

- **Instruction** : Read the document and answer the questions below. When you are done, check your neighbour's answers.

From the title to line 24

1. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **This drug epidemic has a very small impact on the American population.**

☐ True

☒ **False**

Quote two elements from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

(l. 4-5) : " Since 2000, more than a million people in the United States have died of drug overdoses, the majority of which were due to opioids. "

(l. 12-13) : " More than 1,500 Americans per week die from taking some type of opioid, making the drug by far the leading cause of fatal overdoses in the country. "

2. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **Street Fentanyl is mostly produced in America.**

☐ True

☒ **False**

Quote one element from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

(l. 8-9) : " most supply coming from China and Mexico. "

3. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **This specific drug epidemic started because doctors prescribed opioids way too much in the past.**

☒ **True**

☐ False

Quote one element from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

(l. 16-17) : " Analysts say the opioid epidemic started with the overprescription of legal pain medications in the 1990s. "

4. Choose the correct answer (just one) : **The COVID-19 pandemic has made the street Fentanyl epidemic even worse.**

☒ **True**

☐ False

Quote one element from the text to justify your answer (+ indicate the line) :

(l. 6-7) : " the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating the public's abuse of the drug. "

5. Prove that the following statement is wrong (you can quote from the text and give examples of medications) : **Opioids are totally illegal in the US.**

Write complete sentences and use linking words/expressions.

B2 : Nuance your point if you can.

Opioids are legal in the US as long as the patient has a prescription for it. For example, there is a whole list of legal opioids which includes oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, fentanyl and methadone. However, it is totally illegal to buy Fentanyl (or any other medication derived from opium) without a medical prescription.

6. Pick one of the three tasks below (depending on your level).

1. " What is the scale of the epidemic ? " – LEVEL : ■ ■ ■

- **Instruction** : Read this section and make a simple summary for the class. You may quote from the text, but you have to write this summary in your own words.

This epidemic is massive in the US since Fentanyl kills more than terrorist attacks or military operations, and the numbers of victims keeps rising everyday... One of the reasons why this crisis worsened is the COVID-19 pandemic : as people were isolated and struggled to find regular soft drugs, they turned to street Fentanyl, which is unfortunately way more potent for such a small dose. Actually, the equivalent of just ten to fifteen grains of table salt is a lethal dose when it comes to Fentanyl.

2. " What are the demographics of the opioid crisis ? " – LEVEL : ■ □ □

- **Instruction** : Read this section and make a simple summary for the class. You may quote from the text, but you have to write this summary in your own words.

Street Fentanyl kills people of all ages, races or ethnic groups, even though the most affected groups of the population are American Indian and Alaska Native people, Black people, younger adults and men.

3. " What are the economic consequences ? " – LEVEL : ■ ■ □

- **Instruction** : Read this section and make a simple summary for the class. You may quote from the text, but you have to write this summary in your own words.

According to the US JEC, the opioid crisis cost the country around \$1.5 trillion in 2020 (which equates to 7% of the GDP). This sum includes many things like the price of overdose treatments, the loss of productivity of the employees who do drugs or the cost of police actions to fight fentanyl trafficking.