

Fentanyl: Real-World Stories

These case studies are all based on real people and their stories.

► Eddie

Eddie was only 16, but never minded working. He had a job at a fast-food chain working the register, cooking or whatever else was needed. He helped his dad with his delivery business and his mom with painting and drywall. Long hours on the job meant that he got a paycheck and with that came freedom. He bought his own phone and liked to get his own clothes. He even helped his dad pay for a dirt bike.

“He could have been anything he wanted to be,” Eddie’s dad said. “I thought that we were going to build an empire someday.” But then Eddie died of an accidental fentanyl overdose.

Messages on his phone showed he purchased “Percocet” from a guy his family had known for years. As far as Eddie’s dad could tell, the time Eddie overdosed might have been only the second time he ever tried it the drug. Eddie, the youngest of five children, loved gym class and weightlifting and stood out as a leader among his friends. Then fentanyl took it all away.

“It is poison,” Eddie’s dad said. “And when people die from it, countless others around them are left broken. The loss sticks with you – I don’t think the feeling will ever go away.”

► Jaylan

Jaylan was an accomplished athlete, a talented rapper and a sneaker fan. “When he was younger, he would buy them on eBay and various shoe sites online and then he would fix them up and resell them,” said his mother. Football also was a big part of Jaylan’s life. He began playing in seventh grade, was a lineman his freshman and sophomore years and was on the varsity team as a junior and senior, starting all four years.

But during his later high school years, another activity began consuming Jaylan’s time. “He loved football,” his mom said, “but there were some concussions. There was COVID. And there was the allure of drugs. So he got ensnared in addiction.”

When the problem became evident, his family sent him to rehab. But because he had turned 18, he checked himself out after several days. Three months after his high school graduation, Jaylan died at home. He had fentanyl and alcohol in his system.

Since Jaylan’s death, his mom has spent a lot of time educating herself about fentanyl, about addiction, and about the drug trade. She says, “The drug trade is not going to stop, so we need to arm our kids with knowledge before they’re tempted to use drugs, because once addiction kicks in, the battle is almost impossible. Kids have to understand that they are the pawns in someone else’s game—there’s somebody behind that pill who was willing to sacrifice a kid’s health or even a kid’s life out of greed.”

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Fentanyl: Real-World Stories *(continued)*

► Jeanie, Alice and Ron

In one day in New York City, three young professionals died after buying and using drugs from the same dealer. Their deaths weren't overdoses. The victims were poisoned.

Police said the three victims texted the same drug dealer asking for cocaine. The dealer's delivery person was captured on surveillance cameras bringing the drugs to each of their apartments in New York City that day. All three died a short time later.

They didn't know it, but it wasn't just cocaine they were ingesting. The drug was laced with fentanyl, a highly addictive and deadly manufactured opioid. Drug dealers are adding fentanyl to a variety of drugs because it's cheap and highly addictive. Even a tiny amount can be deadly and it's killing people in record numbers.

The parents of the victims say people have to change the way they talk and think about fentanyl-related deaths. "Overdose is the wrong word for what happened to Jeanie and to Ron and Alice," said Jeanie's mother. "They thought they bought cocaine, but it wasn't—it was fentanyl. As a mother, I would say never do drugs, but she did. That doesn't mean she deserved to be murdered."

How the victims died is not how their families want them to be remembered. But they hope their deaths help prevent similar tragedies from happening to other families.

Stories adapted from these sources:

Thomas, J., and L. Bauer. 2023. Deadly Dose. *Kansas City Star*, November 2. Available at: <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article281002308.html>

Krauth, D. 2023. Fentanyl poisoning: 3 fatal does in same night. ABC7 Eyewitness News, March 16. Available at: <https://abc7ny.com/nyc-overdose-deaths-fentanyl/12958055/>