

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3215

August 12, 2024

Dr. Mandy K. Cohen
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Cohen,

I am writing to inquire about the actions the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has taken to monitor the spread of carfentanil in the United States. If New York City (NYC) is any indication, the spread of carfentanil could become a growing concern in the United States. The NYC Department of Health administers a drug-checking program that found traces of carfentanil in multiple samples collected from March 2024 to June 2024.¹ I write as the United States Congressman for NY15 in the Bronx, one of the places where traces of carfentanil have been found.

Fentanyl has given the United States the deadliest drug crisis in American history. In 2023 alone, over 100,000 Americans died from lethal drug overdoses—primarily from fentanyl.² More Americans have died from lethal overdoses in 2023 than from lethal combat in World War I.³

The spread of carfentanil, even in the smallest quantities, would make the deadliest drug crisis far deadlier—by orders of magnitude. Carfentanil is 10,000 times more potent than morphine; 5,000 times more potent than heroin; and 100 times more potent than fentanyl.⁴ Carfentanil is so dangerous, destructive, and deadly that the CDC must never allow it to evade public health surveillance.

Given the growing presence of carfentanil in America's largest city, I am seeking answers to the following questions, which have taken on new urgency:

1. What is the state of the CDC's public health surveillance of carfentanil?
2. Does the CDC have a drug-checking program?
3. How often has the CDC found traces of carfentanil in the samples it has collected?
4. In how many deaths has carfentanil been a factor?

¹ Vasan, A. & New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (2024). *Health Advisory #20: Carfentanil and medetomidine in the NYC drug supply*. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/han/advisory/2024/han-advisory-20.pdf>

² *Products - Vital Statistics Rapid release - Provisional drug overdose data*. (n.d.). <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

³ Mougel, N. & CVCE. (2011). *REPERES – module 1-0 - explanatory notes – World War I casualties – EN* (Centre européen Robert Schuman, Trans.). <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/reperes112018.pdf>

⁴ PBM Academic Detailing Service. (2018). *Fentanyl & carfentanil* (Report IB 10-1137, P96900). https://www.pbm.va.gov/AcademicDetailingService/Documents/Pain_Patient_FentanylCarfentanil_IB101137.pdf

5. Is the CDC procuring or incentivizing the development of technologies capable of detecting carfentanil?

I thank you for your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ritchie Torres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress