

Drugs contaminated with synthetic opioids: a collective message

To anyone that uses drugs

The drugs available in the UK seem to be changing lately. As people services, we have come together to make a shared statement/clarification on some of the new drugs the people we support use, and the risks they present.

New opioids have arrived in the UK in the last two years, called "nitazenes". They have recently been found mixed with heroin, with some being sold as illicit oxycodone pills or even Xanax powders.

Nitazenes can be at least as strong as fentanyl and can be hundreds of times more potent than heroin. They are known to have led to accidental overdoses and deaths of people in several areas across the UK in the last few weeks.

The vast majority of people taking drugs do not expect to die from an overdose. If you use drugs, this information will help you and your friends to stay alive.

Considering new information around contaminated drugs, the way you use drugs might need to change to avoid overdose:

- ✓ Mixing different drugs is common, but it is more likely to cause an overdose. Try to use one at a time. If you are going to mix drugs, use less of each.
- ✓ Try not to use drugs alone, and don't let your mates use them alone either. Watch out for signs of overdose in your friends. The signs include difficulty breathing, blue colouring to the lips or fingertips, unresponsiveness, and limp limbs.
- ✓ Always carry naloxone. It's available from all treatment providers. If someone overdoses, give naloxone to them and call an ambulance.
- ✓ Naloxone only works on opioids. However, if you suspect someone has overdosed give them naloxone even if you're not sure they have taken an opioid. It will not harm your friend.
- ✓ If you use opioids every day your local drug treatment service can support you and prescribe alternatives such as methadone and buprenorphine. Even if abstinence isn't your goal these alternatives can help keep you safe. You will know what you are taking and your risk of overdose may be reduced.
- ✓ If you are already in treatment for opioid dependence and you don't want to use on top, speak to your worker and make sure you're getting the right dose.
- ✓ Use [WEDINOS Sample Testing](#) to test your drugs if you can spare a bit, but it takes time to get the results back so go easy in the meantime.

Signed: Jon Findlay (National Harm Reduction Lead, **Humankind**); Deb Hussey (National Safer Lives Lead - **Turning Point**); Peter Furlong (National Harm Reduction Lead - **Change Grow Live**); Chris Rintoul (Innovation & Harm Reduction Lead - **Cranstoun**); Dr. Judith Yates (Data & Collector Analyst, **Birmingham**).

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