

Tramadol Found As Cut in Drug Samples in the Local Rhode Island Drug Supply



testRI is a two-year study to find out what is in the drug supply in Rhode Island and how changes to the supply are impacting people who use drugs in our community. We are testing used equipment, like pipes and syringes, that are collected from the community or donated by individuals or local organizations. Samples are tested using advanced confirmatory toxicology testing (LC-QTOF-MS).

Data from all samples tested in the study can be found on <https://preventoverdoseri.org/local-drug-supply/>

*Samples we have collected and tested only represent a small part of the local drug supply in Rhode Island and may not represent the broader drug supply in the state. Samples are also not being tested in relation to overdose so outcomes from use, like overdose, are unknown.

Tramadol:

Background:

Tramadol was found in many donated drug samples that were most often reported sold as fentanyl.

In all samples where tramadol was found, fentanyl was also present. Tramadol is often found in low levels as a cut in drugs. However, in one sample (Central Falls July 2022) tramadol made up most of the sample that was sold as fentanyl.

Tramadol (Ultram) is a frequently prescribed opioid pain medication in the US.

Tramadol has complicated pharmacology that can increase toxicity risk.

To have opioid effects tramadol must be converted to o-desmethyltramadol. This conversion is done by a specific set of enzymes (CYP2D6) in the liver. The activity of these enzymes vary a lot among people. Because of this the amount of opioid effects someone experiences when using tramadol can vary.



Why does this matter?

Combining multiple opioids should be avoided because it can increase overdose and toxicity risk.

Active and inactive substances are frequently added as cut to drugs in the unregulated supply to bulk up the amount of drugs for sale.

Most hospital and office-based urine drug testing does not include testing for tramadol.

Tramadol added to the drug supply increases risk of toxicity and drug interactions. Specific populations including those on other medications (e.g., SSRIs) or taking multiple drugs, individuals with diabetes, and those with seizure disorder are at higher risk.

Health Effects:



Tramadol in overdose can cause stopped or slowed breathing and unresponsiveness.



Naloxone should be used to reverse the opioid effects of a tramadol overdose (stopped or slowed breathing).



Additional health risks with tramadol exposure include: (1) seizures, (2) low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), and (3) drug interactions including serotonin toxicity.



Tramadol can cause new seizures in people without a seizure disorder and worsen seizures in people with epilepsy.



Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) has been reported with tramadol exposure. The risk of hypoglycemia is higher in people with diabetes.



Risk of drug interactions is higher with tramadol exposure for people on antidepressants such as SSRIs (e.g., fluoxetine, sertraline) or other drugs that increase serotonin (e.g., methamphetamine).