testRI Local Sample Testing SPOTLIGHT

Nitazenes Found in Samples from 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.

Background:

Recently, nitazenes (isotonitaze, metonitazene, and protonitazene) – a dangerous class of synthetic opioids– were detected in drug samples sold as fentanyl or 'dope' in Rhode Island.

Nitazenes are a novel class of synthetic opioids with varying potency that can be less potent to up to 40 times more potent than fentanyl. Nitazenes have never been approved for medical use in the United States.

Nitazenes have recently been reported in the drug supplies throughout the US including in Philadelphia, Washington DC, Ohio, and Chicago. In these locations, nitazenes have been detected in various forms including powder, solid, and liquids.
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Why does this matter?

Nitazenes are present in the drug supply with and without knowledge of people who use drugs.

The high potency of nitazenes combined with inexperience with dosing, lack of awareness of nitazene presence, and mixing into drugs that already contain fentanyl increases overdose risk.

Human clinical data on nitazenes including risk for dependence, tolerance, and withdrawal with chronic use is limited.

Nitazenes have a different structure than other opioid classes and are not detected using standard urine drug testing or fentanyl test strips.

Health Effects:

The three nitazenes–isotonitazene, metonitazene, and protonitazene–found in samples from Rhode Island are reported to have similar or higher potency than fentanyl.

In all drug samples, a nitazene was found in combination with fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, and xylazine.

These findings are consistent with findings in drug samples across the country where nitazenes have been detected and mixed with fentanyl.

Nitazenes cause opioid effects, and risk of overdose from nitazene exposure is high.

Naloxone (Narcan) is effective in treating nitazene-related opioid overdose.