

Nitazenes: Rare, but More Potent Than Fentanyl

Sadly, most if not all of us have become familiar with the horror stories associated with the synthetic opioid, fentanyl.

Well buckle up folks, you now have a big brother to fentanyl to be concerned about.

Nitazenes, which is up to 20 times more powerful than fentanyl, a drug that is already 50 times more powerful than heroin and 80 to 100 times more potent than morphine is about to give us more cause for concern.

This class of medication was created over 60 years ago as a potential pain relief medication according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Many prescription opioids are used to treat moderate to severe pain. They work by blocking pain signals between the brain and the body. Opioids can also induce feelings of well-being, relaxation and being high. These feelings can lead to substance misuse and dependency.

Now this nitazenes group of synthetic opioids has emerged in the US where there have been reports of labs detecting the presence of nitazenes in the Southeast, South, Midwest and in some areas of the East. The extent that these new opioids are currently being used by people throughout the United States is not entirely clear.

The emergence of nitazenes creates additional concern as people with substance use disorder seek more potent drugs to satisfy addiction.

Since most nitazenes are largely unregulated, they are not subject to the same scrutiny by us in law enforcement as other control substances. This, along with the fact that they can be made inexpensively from legal substances, makes them very appealing for drug traffickers.

Over time, opioids have evolved as people's addiction to them has changed. Every time a cheaper more potent drug is introduced into the illegal drug market the number of overdose deaths increase.

A general lack of awareness of these drugs may result in unforeseen deaths, especially when combined with other drugs.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) classifies the 10 currently known nitazenes as schedule 1 drugs. These are drugs for which there is no currently excepted medical use, and a high potential for abuse.

Other drugs belonging to schedule 1 drugs include: Ecstasy, Heroin, LSD, Marijuana, and Peyote. There's no standardized or centralized mechanism for tracking deaths from nitazenes, or any other new synthetic drugs in the US, which makes it difficult to say how many overdose deaths are associated with these drugs.

Nitazenes are most commonly available and sold in powder form but are also available as pills or as a liquid. It's likely that many users are injecting what they believe to be heroin or fentanyl but are ingesting a substance spiked with nitazenes. In powder form the drugs are often liquefied and injected, but can also be snorted as a powder.

It doesn't appear that nitazenes, or any other synthetic opioid will replace fentanyl in the US at least not in the near future. While nitazenes are behind fentanyl among synthetic opioids they lag far behind the sheer volume of fentanyl in the US, at least for now.

There has been a large increase in drug related deaths in past months according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. This increase is from about 80,000 to well over 120,000. Almost 75% of these deaths involve fentanyl when mixed with other drugs such as cocaine or methamphetamines.

Naloxone, also known by the brand-name Narcan, a synthetic medication approved by the FDA to quickly reverse an opioid overdose. It's an opioid antagonist, which means it binds to opioid receptors to reverse and block the effects of other opioids, according to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Naloxone as I outlined in a previous article about fentanyl is also used to treat overdoses of: Fentanyl, Heroin, Morphine and Oxycodone. It's available over the counter at most pharmacies like CVS and Walgreens. Reach out to your favorite pharmacy for information on this life saving product.

Since nitazenes is a relatively new illicit drug entering the criminal market in the US, I will follow it's integration into our Texas market with my federal and state counterparts.

I will update you with information as it becomes available which will assist you and your family with measures to safeguard against this new dangerous threat.

As always, I hope you find this information informative as well as helpful. Should you need additional information on the specifics of this subject, or any other subject please feel free to reach out to my office by calling my nonemergency number 936-653-4367 and ask my dispatcher for assistance.

Sincerely,

Greg Capers

Sheriff San Jacinto County