



NITAZENE

What You Need To Know

What Are Nitazenes?

Nitazenes are high-potency and illegally manufactured opioids that carry a high risk of respiratory arrest, which can cause overdose and death, often in small amounts. There are over 30 types (analogues) of nitazenes (including isotonitazene, metonitazene, and N-pyrrolidino etonitazene) that can reach over 40 times the potency of fentanyl, and up to 500 times the potency of morphine^{3,4}.

- ▶ Nitazenes were originally developed as pain relievers but were never approved for medical use in humans due to their high risk for overdose and other side effects. Nitazenes are found in the illicit drug market sold as a white powder, crystalline solid, or brown/yellow powder, and can be sold in a vape cartridge or nasal spray. They have been found in tablets/counterfeit pills (e.g., fake oxycodone/alprazolam), heroin, ketamine, and synthetic cannabinoids. Nitazenes can be injected, inhaled, or swallowed^{1,2}.
- ▶ Nitazenes create a high risk for overdose because their potency isn't predictable and because of the risk that they are contained products that community members may not know contain nitazenes. Nitazene drug testing strips can help detect nitazenes in illicit drugs; however, other common testing strips, such as fentanyl testing strips, do not detect nitazenes.

What effects occur with Nitazene use?

Nitazenes have the same adverse effects as fentanyl and other opioids. These include nausea and vomiting, fever and sweating, confusion or constipation, damage to vital organs such as the lungs, brain, and heart⁵, as well as slowing or stopping breathing, coma, and death. LA County has identified two fatal nitazene overdoses in 2024 and one in 2023. The overdose risk when taking nitazenes increases when it is used with other drugs, such as alcohol, sedatives, pain killers, illicit street drugs, or prescription drugs.

Are nitazenes legal?

No, nitazenes are not legal and have no approved medical use in the United States or anywhere in the world. They are classified as an illegal controlled substance in many countries, including the U.S. Nitazenes can cause an opioid overdose, including death. Nitazenes are not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for any medical use, and the FDA warns against buying or using products containing illicit nitazenes.

What should I do if someone I know has taken Nitazene?

If someone is having trouble breathing or is hard to wake up, immediately call 911. If administered quickly enough during an overdose, naloxone and nalmefene may reverse a nitazene overdose,

but repeated doses of medication may be required. For less serious exposures (e.g., alert patients without depressed breathing), contact the Poison Control online tool or by phone at 1-800-222-1222, open 24/7. Naloxone nasal spray is available at Community Health Stations located throughout the County, <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/communityhealthstation/>.

For more information:

- <https://www.samhsa.gov/>
- <https://www.dea.gov/>
- <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/emerging-drug-trends>

More information about public health services related to substance use in LA County is accessible through the mobile-friendly RecoverLA platform: www.RecoverLA.org Medi-Cal members can find substance use treatment services through the resources below:

- Substance Abuse Service Helpline: 1-844-804-7500
- Services and Bed Availability Tool: <http://SUDHelpLA.org>

¹ Philadelphia Department of Public Health (2022) Health Alert: Nitazene analogs, a novel class of synthetic opioids more potent than fentanyl, detected in Philadelphia. Available at: www.phila.gov/substance-use.

² DEA (2025) Nitazenes: An Emerging Threat of a Diverse Group of Synthetic Opioids. Available at: <https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2025-11/STR-002-25-Nitazenes-an-Emerging-Threat-of-a-Diverse-Group-of-Synthetic-Opioids.pdf>.

³ Pereira JRP, Quintas A, Neng NR. Nitazenes: The Emergence of a Potent Synthetic Opioid Threat. *Molecules*. 2025; 30(19):3890. <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules30193890>

⁴ Pergolizzi Jr, Raffa R, LeQuang JAK, Breve F, Varrassi G. (2023). Old Drugs and New Challenges: A Narrative Review of Nitazenes. *Cureus* 15(6) doi: 10.7759/cureus.40736.

⁵ Dowell D, Ragan KR, Jones CM, Baldwin JT, Chou R. CDC Clinical Practice Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Pain — United States, 2022. *MMWR Recomm Rep* 2022;71(No. RR-3):1–95. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.rr7103a1>

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