

NITAZENES: THE FACTS

QUICK FACTS ABOUT NITAZENES

- Nitazenes are extremely strong synthetic opioid drugs. They can be up to 500 times stronger than heroin.
- There is no known safe dose of nitazenes.
- The strength and purity of nitazenes can vary even in the same batch.
- Nitazenes have been found in many parts of the illicit drug supply including MDMA, heroin, cocaine, benzos and ketamine.
- There is a very high risk of overdose if you take nitazenes – always carry naloxone.
- Fentanyl test strips cannot detect nitazenes.

WHAT ARE NITAZENES?

Nitazenes are a group of extremely strong, synthetic opioid drugs like Fentanyl. They act in a similar way to natural opioids (that come from the opium poppy), like morphine or codeine and semi-synthetic opioids such as heroin. However, they are much more dangerous – they can be up to 500 times stronger than heroin and are more likely to stop your breathing than other opioids. They are only found in the illicit drug market, so their purity can vary widely, even in the same batch. Overdosing on nitazenes is very easy.

Nitazenes were originally developed for medical use in the 1950s, but they were never brought into medical use due to the high risk of overdose. They recently re-emerged in the illicit drug market. There is no known safe dosage of nitazenes. Some nitazenes recently found in local and international drug markets are:

- Etazene (etodesnitazene)
- Isotonitazene
- Metonitazene
- Protonitazene
- Protonitazepyne (N-pyrrolidino protonitazene)

Nitazene strength is highly variable. Recently, people believing they were taking one type of nitazene actually took a much stronger type, causing them to overdose.

Nitazenes are commonly found in powders or crystals – some are white, brown or yellow. However, they can be indistinguishable from other drugs. They sometimes are found in pills, liquids or vape refills. Sometimes, when people have bought other drugs such as heroin, cocaine or MDMA (ecstasy), they have been contaminated or completely substituted with nitazenes. They have also been found in counterfeit tablets like benzodiazepines and other types of opioids. This can cause them to be taken unknowingly. Drug warnings have been **released in NSW**, and **around Australia** warning of nitazenes in other drugs. People have had very severe illness and some deaths have been linked to nitazenes.

EFFECTS OF NITAZENES

Nitazenes' effects are similar to other opioids like heroin but are much stronger.

The effects depend on:

- The amount used and its strength
- The method used, such as snorting, swallowing, smoking, vaping or injecting
- People's size, weight and general health
- Whether combined with other drugs
- User tolerance

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

The effects of nitazenes include:

- Euphoria, feeling relaxed
- Short term pain and stress relief
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever and sweating
- Drowsiness
- Slowed and shallow breathing and heart rate
- Small pupils (pinpoint pupils)
- Sleepiness, drowsiness and coma

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Nitazenes' long-term effects are not well known as they haven't been studied as much as other opioids. However, they may have similar long-term effects, such as:

- Tolerance (needing more of a drug to feel the same effects)
- Dependence
- Long-term and severe constipation
- Heart and lung problems

OVERDOSE

There is a very high risk of overdose when using nitazenes due to their strength, and because you can't know which nitazene you are taking. There is no known safe dosage of nitazenes.

Signs of an overdose can include:

- Breathing difficulties
 - Shallow or slow breathing or snoring
 - They can cause people to stop breathing very quickly, often within minutes
- Confusion
- Pinpoint pupils
- Cold and clammy skin and low body temperature
- Bluish or grey colour to skin and nails because of low oxygen
- Drowsiness
- Coma
- Loss of consciousness
- Death

To help prevent an overdose:

- Do not use high doses, especially if using a new batch, have obtained from a new supplier or have taken a break.
- First time opioid users and people who have taken a break will have no tolerance and can have harmful side effects and overdose including death.
- Do not mix with other drugs, particularly depressants such as opioids, alcohol, sleeping tablets e.g. benzodiazepines, antidepressants, ketamine or GHB.
- Do not use alone
- Always carry naloxone

NITAZENE TEST STRIPS

Instant test strips for nitazenes are available, but may not detect all nitazenes of concern.

Fentanyl test strips do not detect nitazenes.

NALOXONE

- You should carry naloxone (Nyxoid®, Prenoxad®) if:
 - You are using opioids or other illicit drugs
 - You are around people who are using drugs
 - Hosting or going to a party where drugs will be present
- Naloxone is a life-saving medicine that can temporarily reverse an overdose of opioids. It works by stopping the action of opioid drugs in the brain.
- It is safe and easy to use if someone is experiencing an overdose.
- It is available in a very easy to use nasal spray and as a pre-filled injection.
- You should always call 000 (triple zero) for an ambulance even if naloxone has been given and they seem to have recovered.
- Overdoses involving nitazenes often require multiple doses of naloxone. The effects of naloxone may wear off, and ongoing doses and hospital treatment may be needed.
- If you might experience or witness an opioid overdose, you can get naloxone for free without a prescription in NSW from some community pharmacies, needle & syringe programs, opioid treatment services and NUAA. Visit [Your Room - Naloxone](#) for participating sites and more information on take-home naloxone.
- NUAA can mail you naloxone in a discreet package. Order via their online shop: shop.nuaa.org.au or call (02) 9171 6650.

OPIOID-RELATED EMERGENCY

Always phone 000 (triple zero) for an ambulance and tell the operator that the person has overdosed. You will not get in trouble for seeking medical care.

You should also:

- Put them on their side (in the recovery position if the person is unconscious)
- Stay with the person; check their breathing, clear their airway
- Do CPR if they stop breathing (if you know how)
- Administer naloxone if available

In the case of an overdose DO NOT:

- Inject the person with another illicit drug
- Put them in the shower or bath
- Put anything in their mouth (this can cause choking, block airways and stop breathing)

MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

Never use nitazenes if you have other drugs in your system, such as other opioids, alcohol, benzodiazepines, ketamine, GHB or others. Combining nitazenes with other drugs increases risk of overdose and death.

TOLERANCE AND DEPENDENCE

Anyone who uses a nitazenes can develop a tolerance. Tolerance means you need to take more of the drug to feel the same effect you used to have with smaller amounts. If using it regularly you may soon find it difficult to function normally without it. You may also find it difficult to stop using or control how much you use. Regular users of an opioid can become dependent very quickly but not all people who try them become dependent.

PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

There is limited evidence about how nitazenes affect unborn babies or are passed on during breastfeeding. However, effects are likely to be similar to other opioids.

Any non-prescribed opioid use, including injecting use of opioids, during pregnancy carries risks including:

- Premature birth, miscarriage or stillbirth;
- Having babies with low birth weight;
- Passing infections, such as HIV, hepatitis B or C or blood poisoning, onto the baby;
- Health and social problems during and after pregnancy.

Effective treatments are available for regular opioid use. Talk to your doctor and antenatal staff about opioid use and attend regular antenatal check-ups. There are specialist services for substance use during pregnancy available in NSW as well.

Babies can also have problems after they are born. The baby of a woman using opioids during pregnancy (prescribed or non-prescribed) has a risk of withdrawal following birth. Medication may be necessary. It is important to get help from health staff on how to care for your baby.

Opioids pass into breast milk and can cause further adverse effects on a breast-fed baby. It is generally risky to take any drug while breastfeeding without medical advice.

THE LAW

Using nitazenes, keeping, selling or giving them to someone else is illegal. If you are caught, you could face fines or even a prison sentence.

It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs. If you break this law you could lose your licence for a set time, or be fined. Anyone under the influence of drugs who kills or injures another person while driving a motor vehicle, can be sentenced to a term in prison.

WITHDRAWAL

People who are dependent on opioids find it very hard to stop using or cut down because of the withdrawal symptoms. These can begin to occur within only a few hours after the last use. Symptoms can include:

- Sweats and chills
- Sleeplessness and broken sleep
- Diarrhoea
- Restless legs
- Stomach and leg cramps
- Nausea
- Runny nose and eyes
- Cravings

If you are experiencing problems with withdrawal contact your doctor or health service.

SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

na.org.au for Narcotics Anonymous Australia, a non-profit organisation aiming to support people to abstain from drugs.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs 24 hours, 7 days a week, call the **National Alcohol and Other Drugs Hotline 1800 250 015**.

It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Service in the state or territory you are calling from.

OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES

- nuaa.org.au NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) is a peak drug user organisation in NSW providing harm reduction information and blood borne virus prevention peer education.
- Poisons Information Centre is a 24/7 call centre service to NSW and after hours call centre across Australia. Call 13 11 26.
- Nepean Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (NYDAS) works within a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people (12-20 years) related to their alcohol and other drug use. Call (02) 4734 2129 or (02) 4734 1333.
- ahmrc.org.au for Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW. Go to Members/ Members regional map/ Member services or Member websites.
- alcohol.gov.au provides information about related health issues and Australian government policy.
- druginfo.adf.org.au for facts and resources on alcohol and other drugs and the prevention of related harm.
- druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au State Library of New South Wales provides up to date information for public libraries in NSW.
- headspace.org.au for mental health and wellbeing support, information and services for young people (12-25 years) and their family and friends.
- kidshelp.com.au is a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5-25 years. Counselling is offered by web, email or call 1800 55 1800.
- au.reachout.com ReachOut is an Australian online youth mental health service with a mobile-friendly site and forums where you can access help, information and support.
- shil.nsw.gov.au for free and confidential sexual health support and information.
- smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au Smart Recovery is a voluntary self-help group that assists people in recovering from alcohol, drug use and other addictive behaviours.
- youthaction.org.au Youth Action is the peak organisation for young people in NSW. Use the search option to access a directory of NSW youth services.
- youthsolutions.com.au for services for young people 12-25 years of age and the community including prevention and health promotion, drug and alcohol education, community programs and referral. You can also call (02) 4628 2319. [provides services to young people in Macarthur & Wingecarribee].