



County of San Diego

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February 5, 2024

NITAZENES: ALERT FOR EMS PROFESSIONALS

Nitazenes, a group of highly potent synthetic opioids, have been found as contaminants in the illicit drug supply.^{1,2} They have been linked to overdose deaths in several states.^{2,3} Detection of nitazenes is challenging, as routine testing is not performed. This memo serves as an alert for EMS professionals who may encounter patients that have ingested nitazenes.

Because nitazenes are opioids, they are reversible with naloxone. As with other [novel potent opioids](#), nitazenes are thought to be considerably more powerful than fentanyl and may require significantly higher doses of naloxone to reverse. Notably, nitazenes should not be confused with [xylazine](#),⁴ a non-opioid sedative, increasingly found in the illicit drug supply. However, because xylazine is often combined with opioids such as fentanyl, naloxone should be given if a xylazine-involved overdose is suspected.

Naloxone should be administered to any patient who presents with the classic opioid overdose triad: altered level of consciousness, pinpoint pupils, and decreased respirations. Monitoring of respiratory status to detect hypoventilation, including use of end-tidal CO₂, is critical when managing patients with suspected drug overdose. In addition to assisting ventilations as needed, consider administration of [repeat naloxone doses](#) if there is concern for nitazenes or other potent opioid ingestion.

Thank you for continuing to provide outstanding care to our patients.

Respectfully,

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¹ Benzimidazole-Opioids Other Name: Nitazenes. Drug Enforcement Administration, Diversion Control Division, Drug & Chemical Evaluation Section. January 2024. Accessed February 1, 2024. https://deaddiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_chem_info/benzimidazole-opioids.pdf

² Johnson A. What To Know About Nitazenes: Rare But Emerging Opioids More Potent Than Fentanyl. Forbes. January 2, 2024. Accessed February 1, 2024.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ariannajohnson/2024/01/02/what-to-know-about-nitazenes-rare-but-emerging-opioids-more-potent-than-fentanyl/?sh=7fc8e8221c1e>

³ Roberts A, Korona-Bailey J, Mukhopadhyay S. Notes from the Field: Nitazene-Related Deaths — Tennessee, 2019–2021. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2022;71:1196–1197. DOI: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7137a5.htm>

⁴ CDC. What you should know about xylazine. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. November 28, 2023. Accessed February 2, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/other-drugs/xylazine/faq.html#what>