

Results from 149 samples checked

March 25 – April 7, 2023

Key findings

- In 13 expected¹ fentanyl substances²:

5%	was the average³ amount of fentanyl found	3 – 7%	was the range⁴ of fentanyl found in half of the substances ²
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We are currently without a long-term funding commitment, which has resulted in changes to our service. Specifically, **we cannot consistently quantify samples to report the amount of a drug found**. We know our service users and many other groups (clinicians, toxicologists, coroners) rely heavily on our quantity-based information. We sincerely apologize for this inconvenience.

- 8% of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ were known to be **associated with an overdose**: all contained fentanyl; almost all were in combination with other fentanyl-related and/or benzodiazepine-related drugs
- 53% of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ **contained benzodiazepine-related drug(s)**: almost one third of these samples contained multiple benzodiazepine-related drugs
- 36% of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ **contained fluorofentanyl** (roughly as strong as fentanyl)
- 12% of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ **contained a nitazene opioid** (up to 10 times stronger than fentanyl)
- 4% of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ **contained carfentanil** (up to 100 times stronger than fentanyl)
- 3% of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ **contained xylazine** (veterinary tranquilizer)
- During this reporting period, the [Toronto Police Service](#) and data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario indicated an increase in suspected overdoses in the city. **This increase in suspected overdoses aligns with our findings that the unregulated opioid supply continues to be more contaminated and less predictable:**
 - Over one third of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ contained multiple high-potency opioids, including fentanyl, fluorofentanyl, nitazene opioids, and/or carfentanil. Using high-potency

opioids in combination may result in extreme sedation and dangerous suppression of the respiratory system. Since these drugs are so strong, the risk of overdose is increased, and greater than normal doses of naloxone may be required to rouse individuals experiencing an overdose.

- Over half of the expected¹ fentanyl samples⁵ contained other central nervous system and respiratory depressants, like benzodiazepine-related drugs. Using fentanyl in combination with other central nervous system or respiratory depressants increases the risk of dangerous suppression of vitals (e.g., slowing down of breathing, blood pressure, heart rate).

Expected fentanyl substances

- 69% (35) of the expected¹ fentanyl substances⁶ **contained fentanyl and other drugs**, including:
 - 91% (32) contained caffeine
 - 43% (15) contained at least one additional high-potency opioid (!):
 - 40% (14) contained fluorofentanyl (!)
 - 6% (2) contained metonitazene (!)
 - 3% (1) contained carfentanil (!)
 - 40% (14) contained at least one benzodiazepine-related drug (!):
 - 29% (10) contained bromazolam (!)
 - 11% (4) contained flubromazepam (!)
 - 17% (6) contained bromofentanyl (!)
 - 3% (1) contained xylazine (!)

Unexpected noteworthy drugs found in other expected substances

- 17% (11) of the remaining substances,⁶ meaning substances² that weren't expected¹ to be fentanyl, **contained an unexpected noteworthy drug**, including:
 - 20% (3) of **expected¹ cocaine substances²** contained levamisole (!)
 - 7% (1) of **expected¹ cocaine substances²** contained phenacetin (!)
 - 50% (1) of **expected¹ ketamine substances²** contained benzocaine (!)
 - 100% (2) of **expected carfentanil substances²** contained a combination of fentanyl (!), bromofentanyl (!), and benzodiazepine-related drugs (!)
 - 100% (2) of **expected¹ Oxycodone (OxyContin) substances²** contained a nitazene opioid (!)
 - 100% (2) of **expected¹ Percocet substances²** contained fentanyl (!) or a nitazene opioid (!)

Not sure what some of these drugs are? View our drug dictionary: www.drugchecking.cdpe.org/drug-dictionary

Notes

1 | Expected (drug): When a sample is submitted to be checked, the drug that sample was bought or got as is recorded. We call it the "expected drug". Knowing the expected drug helps us tailor our harm reduction advice. It also helps us understand contamination to drugs rather than combinations of drugs (e.g., fentanyl was found in a cocaine sample rather than fentanyl and cocaine were found together).

2 | Substances: Could be a small amount of powder, crystals, rocks, blotter, or liquid, or a crushed bit of a pill.

3 | Average amount: We arrange the amount of fentanyl found in expected fentanyl substances in ascending or descending order, determine the median (i.e., the middle number), and use that number as the "average". More information about the amounts of fentanyl, cocaine, carfentanil, etizolam, and caffeine found as a proportion of the total sample submitted for expected opioid, cocaine, crack cocaine, and some other powder substance samples can be found on [our website](#).

4 | Range: Represents the amount of fentanyl found in 50% of the expected fentanyl substances checked. More information about the amounts of fentanyl, cocaine, carfentanil, etizolam, and caffeine found as a proportion of the total sample submitted for expected opioid, cocaine, crack cocaine, and some other powder substance samples can be found on [our website](#).

5 | Samples: Includes both substances and used drug equipment. Substances could be a small amount of powder, crystals, rocks, blotter, or liquid, or a crushed bit of a pill. Used equipment could be a used cooker or filter, or leftover liquid from a syringe.

6 | Reason for reporting only substance samples: While Toronto's Drug Checking Service checks both substances and used equipment, drug equipment – like cookers – are often re-used. The mass spectrometry technologies used for this drug checking service are so sensitive that very trace amounts of drugs may be found. This means that when equipment is re-used, drugs from past use may present in the results for the sample that is being checked. This can interfere with up-to-date drug supply monitoring, so we've noted when we exclude used equipment from this report.

7 | Isotonitazene/protonitazene: Because isotonitazene and protonitazene have a very similar chemical structure, it is not currently possible for Toronto's Drug Checking Service to differentiate between the two. For this reason, we report the two drugs together.

8 | Substances that unexpectedly contain high-potency opioids or benzodiazepine-related drugs and not the expected drug: Our reports highlight unexpected noteworthy drugs found in all checked substances. When high-potency opioids or benzodiazepine-related drugs are found unexpectedly in a substance sample and the expected drug is not present, we flag it but are hesitant to consider it contamination of the expected drug. Instead, we assume there is an issue with the expected drug: the person who sold or provided the drugs accidentally mixed up their drugs, the service user accidentally mixed up their drugs, or the expected drug was recorded incorrectly during sample collection. These samples require special consideration.

(!) | Unexpected noteworthy drug: "Noteworthy drugs" are drugs that (i) are linked to overdose or other adverse effects, (ii) are highly potent or related to highly potent drugs, or (iii) may not be desired by some service users. Noteworthy drugs are flagged when they are unexpectedly found in checked samples.

Toronto's Drug Checking Service is a public health service that aims to reduce the harms associated with substance use and, specifically, to prevent overdose by offering people who use drugs timely and detailed information on the contents of their drugs. Beyond educating individual service users, results for all samples are combined, analyzed, and publicly disseminated every other week to communicate drug market trends and inform care for people who use drugs, advocacy, policy, and research. **Sign up** to receive reports, alerts, and other information on Toronto's unregulated drug supply.

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