

CRIME PREVENTION

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Nitazene: Global Synthetic Opioid Threat

Nitazenes, a class of synthetic opioids, have a potency up to 40 times greater than fentanyl. Nitazenes are largely sourced from chemical suppliers in China, who rapidly adapt to regulatory changes by introducing new variants when existing compounds are controlled or as demand shifts towards novel opioids not yet deemed illegal.^{1,2}

Key Concerns:

- Reduced Naloxone Effectiveness:** Nitazenes exhibit reduced responsiveness to naloxone, often requiring multiple doses to block nitazene effects to reverse an overdose. This significantly complicates emergency medical intervention.^{1,3,4}
- Potency & Overdose Risk:** Nitazene tablets seized in the U.S. from international express mail in 2023 contained an average of 29mg of metonitazene, exceeding the amount found in typical fentanyl tablets by a factor of ten. This is 145 times the DEA's estimated fatal dose.³
- Polydrug Mixtures:** Polydrug use is the concurrent or sequential use of multiple drugs. Nitazenes are frequently encountered in combination with fentanyl, heroin, and cocaine, amplifying the risk of overdose and addiction due to synergistic effects. Primary adverse effects include sedation and respiratory depression.^{2,3}
- Disguised Appearance:** Law enforcement reports indicate nitazenes look like legitimate pills (like M-30s) or yellowish powders, which are often mixed with other drugs.²
- Cartel Activity:** Due to law enforcement's focus on fentanyl, cartels are increasingly using nitazenes (specifically n-pyrrolidino isotonitazene and n-pyrrolidino etonitazene) as cutting agents in heroin, cocaine, and counterfeit prescription drugs.²

Though originally developed in the 1950s for research, nitazenes were never approved for medical use. Several are classified as Schedule I controlled substances in the U.S. and controlled internationally. The top five nitazenes identified by the National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) are metonitazene, protonitazene, n-pyrrolidino etonitazene, n-desethyl isotonitazene, and isotonitazene. To date, the NFLIS has identified encounters with 17 distinct nitazene variants across the U.S. with methylenedioxynitazene and n-desethyl protonitazene newly detected in drug samples during 2024. Several states are considering legislation to further control these substances.²

Nitazene is sold under the common street names: Zeens, Zeenies, ISO, Tony.



N-pyrrolidino Protonitazene (Source: DEA)

Signs of an opioid overdose

- Unconsciousness
- Very small pupils
- Slow or shallow breathing
- Vomiting
- An inability to speak
- Faint heartbeat
- Limp arms and legs
- Pale skin
- Purple lips and fingernails

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Nitazene-Related Deaths – Tennessee, 2019–2021, 16 September 2022.

2. U.S. Department of Justice/Drug Enforcement Administration, 2025 National Drug Threat Assessment, May 2025.

3. The Center for Forensic Science Research & Education, Emerging Global Synthetic Opioid Threat: Increasing Reports of Nitazene Toxicity, January 2025.

4. National Institute on Drug Abuse, Naloxone DrugFacts, January 2022.

5. European Union Drugs Agency, EU Drug Market: New Psychoactive Substances-Distribution and Supply in Europe: New Opioids, 27 June 2024 (Additional Reference, Not Used in Report)



IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL MILITARY POLICE OR CALL 911

Report drug crimes to your nearest CID Office at <https://www.cid.army.mil/The-Agency/CID-Locations> or ANONYMOUSLY at: <https://www.cid.army.mil/Submit-a-Tip>