



# EMERGING SYNTHETIC DRUG THREATS

## 2026 – United States and Puerto Rico Overview

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### What Is Happening?

The illicit drug market is rapidly evolving. It is becoming increasingly common to encounter drugs that have been mixed or adulterated with highly potent and dangerous synthetic compounds.

Today, many overdose events are no longer caused by a single substance but rather by unpredictable combinations of synthetic opioids, veterinary sedatives, stimulants, and other substances.

These trends present significant challenges for healthcare professionals, EMS personnel, law enforcement officers, correctional staff, prevention specialists, and public health agencies.

### Key emerging threats

#### Fentanyl and Analogs

- Leading driver of overdose deaths.
- Frequently mixed with cocaine and counterfeit pills.
- Can cause rapid and fatal respiratory depression.

#### Carfentanil

- An extremely potent fentanyl analog.
- Even minute amounts can be fatal.
- Associated with mass overdose events in the United States.

#### Nitazenes

- New generation of synthetic opioids.
- Some compounds may be more potent than fentanyl.
- May require multiple doses of naloxone.

#### Brorphine y Analogs

- Illicit synthetic opioids associated with overdoses and fatalities.
- Potency is comparable to or greater than some traditional opioids.
- Frequently detected in combination with fentanyl and other substances.



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- May cause severe respiratory depression and present challenges for toxicological detection.
- Require ongoing monitoring by forensic laboratories, public health agencies, and first responders.

### **Xylazine y Medetomidine**

- Both are veterinary sedatives used as adulterants.
- Cause prolonged sedation.
- Naloxone does not fully reverse their effects.

### **Synthetic Benzodiazepines**

- Example: Bromazolam.
- Associated with profound sedation and amnesia.
- Frequently found in combination with synthetic opioids.

### **Opioid-Contaminated Cocaine**

- Elevated risk for individuals without opioid tolerance.
- Can result in unexpected overdoses.
- Represents an emerging threat in Puerto Rico.

### **Counterfeit Pills**

- Designed to resemble legitimate medications.
- Frequently contain fentanyl or other dangerous substances.
- Pose a significant risk to adolescents and young adults.

## **Why is this important?**

The current polysubstance environment means:

- ✓ Overdose incidents are becoming increasingly complex and unpredictable.
- ✓ Toxicology testing may not identify all substances present.
- ✓ Patients may require prolonged monitoring and observation.
- ✓ Collaboration between public health and public safety partners is more important than ever.



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## What should we do?

### Healthcare Professionals

- Administer naloxone when opioid exposure is suspected.
- Maintain appropriate clinical vigilance and monitoring.
- Facilitate access to evidence-based treatment services.
- Utilize person-centered language based on respect and dignity.

### First Responders

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of overdose.
- Activate EMS as quickly as possible.
- Administer naloxone when available and authorized.
- Share information regarding emerging drug trends observed in the community.
- Avoid non-discriminatory language.

### All Partners

- Stay informed about emerging threats.
- Promote prevention and public education efforts.
- Strengthen interagency collaboration.
- Support harm reduction strategies and access to services.

## Key Message

**Today's threat is not a single drug. It is an increasingly adulterated, dynamic, and unpredictable illicit drug supply.**

**Preparedness, situational awareness, education, and collaboration between public health and public safety partners remain our most effective tools for protecting lives and communities.**

### Need Additional Information?

To request information, intelligence products, technical assistance, or to schedule presentations and training sessions related to emerging drug trends, overdose response and prevention, and other threats associated with psychoactive substances, please contact: **Jose M. Betancourt** 📞 787-600-7791 ✉️ [jbetancourt@prvihidta.org](mailto:jbetancourt@prvihidta.org).

We welcome the opportunity to assess your information needs and provide data, resources, briefings, or specialized assistance tailored to your agency, organization, or community.