

Aug. 21, 2023

Summary

The Indiana Department of Health is alerting law enforcement, first responders, clinicians, and public health professionals about an emerging drug called bromazolam. Bromazolam is a novel or designer benzodiazepine and is being found on the street under other names, such as “XLI-268,” “Xanax,” “Fake Xanax,” and “Dope.” Bromazolam is frequently reported in combination with other drugs, most often with the opioid, fentanyl. Naloxone should be administered if an overdose is suspected.

Background

Bromazolam was created for medicinal purposes in the 1970s but was never approved for use in the United States (Papsun et. al, 2022). Its first appeared in the United States in 2019, with the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education’s NPS Discovery first reporting positive results for the drug in May 2020. (Papsun, 2023) Since then, the drug has gone from 4% of the overall novel or designer benzodiazepine supply in 2021 to 73% of the supply in the first six months of 2023 (Papsun, 2023).

Emergence comes around the time that similar drugs - etizolam, flualprazolam, clonazolam, flubromazolam and diclazepam – were temporarily placed on Schedule 1 of the Controlled Substance Act in December 2022 (DEA & DOJ, 2023).

Bromazolam can be sold as tablets, powders and gummies, and is frequently mixed with opioids, such as fentanyl (Expert Committee on Drug Dependence, 2022). Anecdotal information says that the “typical” recreational dose of this drug is thought to be 1 mg, with effects occurring 15-45 minutes after administration and lasting 5-8 hours.

Data Sources

CFSRE & NMS Labs

- From first report in September 2020 through June 2023, there were a total of 1,791 blood samples which tested positive for bromazolam (Papsun et. al, 2022).
- Of 1,051 bromazolam blood samples reported between Jan.-June 2023, roughly 83% were fentanyl positive (Papsun et. al, 2022).

Indiana Toxicology

- Toxicology results of Indiana decedents from January through June 2023: 35 tested positive for Bromazolam, with 8 and 9 results coming in April and May respectively. Bromazolam was not tested for prior to 2023.

Overdose Signs and Symptoms

Bromazolam, like many other novel or designer benzodiazepines, can have the following adverse effects: loss of coordination, drowsiness, dizziness, blurred vision, slurred speech, muscle relaxation, respiratory depression, amnesia, death (Papsun et. al, 2022).

As mentioned previously, bromazolam is frequently found mixed with opioids. Signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose may include troubled breathing; small pupils; unconsciousness or unresponsiveness; snoring, choking, or gurgling; cold or clammy skin; pale or blue skin; and discolored lips or fingernails. If an overdose is suspected, call 911 and administer naloxone right away, if available.

Obtaining Naloxone

The Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) has two grant opportunities for qualified agencies to receive Narcan nasal spray opioid rescue kits. The first opportunity is available to any local health department (LHD) in the state of Indiana. The other opportunity is for rural first responder agencies, such as police, EMS, corrections, and/or fire departments. These grants are closed but will reopen with new grant periods. If you have any questions about the naloxone grant opportunities at IDOH, please email Naloxone Program Manager Laura Hollowell at LHollowell@health.in.gov or Drug Overdose Prevention Program Manager Carrie Bennett at CBennett1@health.in.gov.

Additionally, as of March 29, 2023, naloxone can now be purchased at all pharmacies as an over-the-counter medication. Indiana also has a standing order in place, signed by Indiana State Health Commissioner Lindsay Weaver, M.D., FACEP, in 2023, so all Indiana residents can purchase naloxone without a prescription.

Lastly, to obtain naloxone you may visit [OptIN.in.gov](https://optin.in.gov) and use the "Find Naloxone Entity" tab to find naloxone providers. Registered OptIN entities, such as treatment centers, overdose prevention organizations, community corrections facilities, pharmacies and local health departments, have naloxone doses available for distribution.

Resources

- Additional IDOH overdose data can be found at <https://www.in.gov/health/overdose-prevention/overdose-surveillance/indiana/>
- Additional IDOH naloxone information can be found at <https://www.in.gov/health/overdose-prevention/naloxone/>
- CDC opioid resources can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/index.html>



References

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- Papsun, D. M. (2023). *An open access drug early warning system – tracking trends and prevalence in the United States*. The Center for Forensic Science Research & Education. <https://www.cfsre.org/resources/presentations>
- Papsun, D. M., Krotulski, A. J., Mastrovito, R., Walton, S. E., & Logan, B. K. (2022). *Bromazolam prevalence surging across the United States driven in part by increasing detections alongside fentanyl*. The Center for Forensic Science Research & Education. <https://www.cfsre.org/nps-discovery/public-alerts/bromazolam-prevalence-surging-across-the-united-states-driven-in-part-by-increasing-detections-alongside-fentanyl/>



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