



**THE LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS
AND PUBLIC POLICY ASSOCIATION**

Emerging Illicit Drug Trends in 2026

**NGA Criminal Justice Policy Advisors' Briefing
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ABOUT LAPPA



501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to conduct legal and legislative research and analysis and draft legislation on effective law and policy in the areas of public safety and health, substance use disorder, and the criminal justice system.

ONDCP's Model Acts Program Grant recipient since 2019.

NOVEL PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

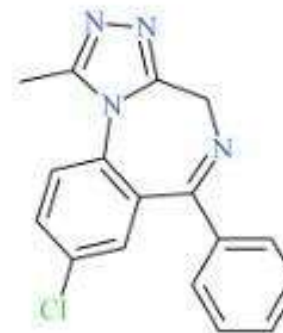
- Substances that mimic the effects of other illicit or prescription drugs
- Often created by clandestine chemist modifying existing chemical structures
- The term “novel” does not necessarily mean the substance is newly created or never seen before
 - Could just be newly available in the drug market
 - Substance is being used in a new way or by a different population than it was traditionally created for
- Often marketed as “legal highs” or “research chemicals”



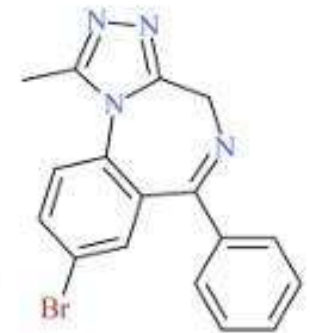
BROMAZOLAM

- Novel benzodiazepine
- Belongs to a class of benzodiazepines originally developed in the 1970s
- Structurally related to alprazolam (Xanax)
- Appearance in illicit drug supply
 - 2016 - Europe
 - 2019 - U.S.
- On March 16, 2026, the DEA temporarily placed bromazolam in Schedule I (91 Fed. Reg. 12,504)

ALPRAZOLAM



BROMAZOLAM



[Bromazolam factsheet](#)

XYLAZINE AND MEDETOMIDINE

- Alpha-2 agonist
- FDA approved for use in animals only
- Xylazine has been detected in the U.S. illicit drug supply since the 1970s
 - 2000s - appearing as a frequent additive in Puerto Rico
 - 2010s - gaining prevalence in mainland U.S.
- Medetomidine first appeared in the U.S. drug supply in July 2022 and is 200 times more potent than xylazine
- Medetomidine does not appear to cause the severe wounds associated with xylazine



[Xylazine](#) and [Medetomidine](#) factsheets

XYLAZINE AND MEDETOMIDINE

- Not federally controlled
 - But federal law limits their use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian (21 C.F.R. § 522.2662; 21 C.F.R. § 522.1335)
 - April 2023, former ONDCP Director Rahul Gupta, MD, designated fentanyl adulterated or associated with xylazine as an emerging threat to the U.S.
- Xylazine is scheduled in several jurisdictions, ranging from Schedule I to Schedule V
- Medetomidine is not currently scheduled in any state or the District of Columbia



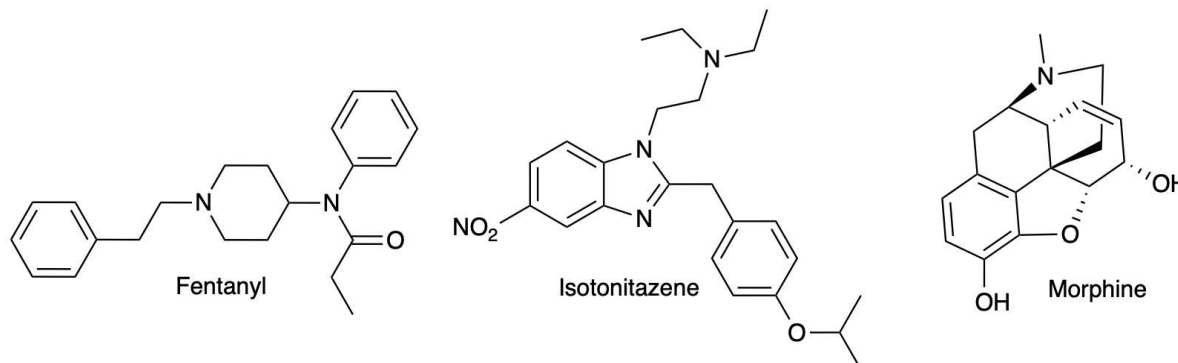
NOVEL OPIOIDS

- Fentanyl and fentanyl analogs
 - Fentanyl is Schedule II
 - Carfentanil is Schedule II; only FDA approved for animal use
 - Most fentanyl analogs Schedule I—HALT Fentanyl Act (S. 331) signed into law July 2025



NOVEL OPIOIDS

- Nitazines
 - group of synthetic opioids derived from 2-benzylbenzimidazole
 - Developed in 1950s, but never FDA approved
 - Started appearing in U.S. illicit drug market in late 2010s/early 2020s
 - Some 10 times stronger than fentanyl
 - Includes butonitazene, etodesnitazine, flunitazene, isotonitazene (Iso), metonitazene, and N-pyrrolidino etonitazene (Pyro)

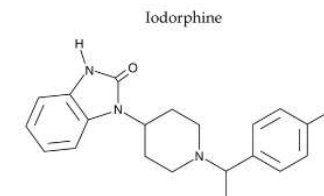
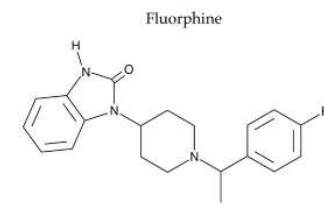
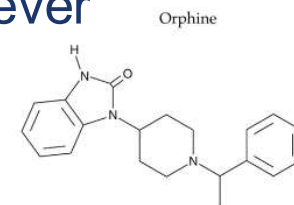
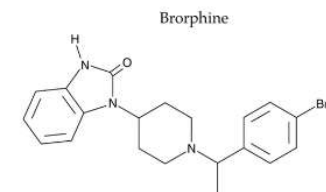


[Nitazines](#), [Isotonitazene](#), and [N-pyrrolidino etonitazene](#) factsheets

NOVEL OPIOIDS

- Orphines

- Benzimidazol-2 - one class of potent synthetic opioids
- First developed in 1960s
- Bezitramide (Burgodin) sold in Europe until 2004; never FDA approved and designated as Schedule II
- Brorphine
 - 2018 – First reported in scientific literature
 - 2020 – First appeared in U.S. illicit drug supply
 - March 2023 – Permanently added to Schedule I
- Includes Chlorphine, N-Propionitrile Chlorphine (Cychlorphine), 5,6-Dichloro Desmethylchlorphine (SR-17018), Spirochlorphine (R-6890), Spirobrorphine, and 5,6-Dicholoro Brorphine (SR-14968).



Orphines factsheet

NOVEL OPIOIDS

MAIN NPS OPIOID SUBCLASSES



FENTANYLS 2013 - PRESENT

Fentanyl
3-Methylfentanyl
Carfentanil
Butyrylfentanyl
Cyclopropylfentanyl
Isobutyrylfentanyl
Fluoro-Isobutyrylfentanyl
Methoxyacetylfentanyl
O-methyl fentanyl
P-Fluorofentanyl
Others (~65) ...

All controlled either by name
or through core structure
scheduling.

NITAZENES 2019 TO PRESENT

Isotonitazene
Metonitazene
Butonitazene
Protonitazene
Flunitazene
Etodesnitazene
N-Pyrrolidino
protonitazene
N-Pyrrolidino metonitazene
N-Pyrrolidino etonitazene
N-desethyl isotonitazene
Others (~4)...

Most currently controlled in
the US permanently or
temporarily, by name

ORPHINES 2025 - PRESENT

Brorphine
Chlorphine
N-Propionitrile Chlorphine
5,6-Dicholoro
Desmethylchlorphine
Spirochlorphine
Spirobrorphine
5,6-dicholoro Brorphine
(others evolving rapidly)

Only Brorphine currently
scheduled in the US
Others are not scheduled

<https://www.cfsre.org/nps-discovery/public-alerts/emerging-global-synthetic-opioid-threats-benzimidazol-2-ones-the-orphines>

KRATOM AND ITS ALKALOIDS

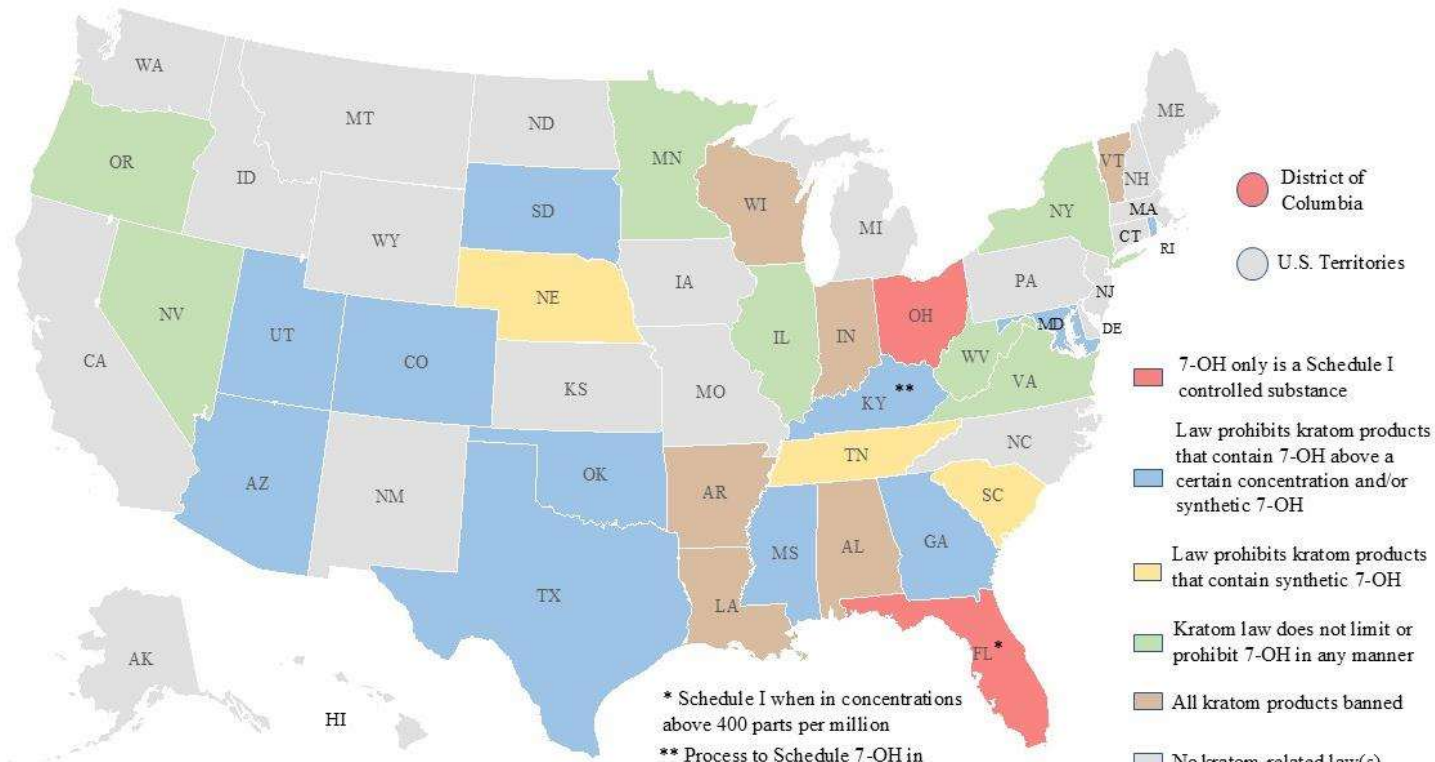
- **Kratom** – A herb derived from a leafy Southeast Asian tree, known formally as *Mitragyna speciosa*
- **Mitragynine** – The most abundant kratom alkaloid and its primary psychoactive component; binds to mu-opioid receptors
- **7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH)** – 10 times more potent than mitragynine
- **Mitragynine pseudoinodoxyl (MP)** – 100 times more potent than mitragynine
- **Dihydro-7-hydroxymitragynine (MGM-15)** – Synthetic, 30 times more potent than mitragynine



Kratom [50-state summary](#) and [factsheet](#)

KRATOM AND ITS ALKALOIDS

Kratom: Regulation of 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH)



* Schedule I when in concentrations above 400 parts per million
 ** Process to Schedule 7-OH in concentrations above 400 parts per million has been initiated, but not yet finalized

*As of January 2026

OTHER NPS TO KEEP AN EYE ON

- Tianeptine
- Intoxicating hemp products
- Synthetic cannabinoids (K2, Spice)
- Synthetic cathinones (Bath salts)
- Phenibut
- Phenethylamines (“2C” compounds; often found in “pink cocaine”)
- BTMPS





QUESTIONS?

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