# Rising Deaths from Synthetic Opioids Grip UK Streets as Nitazenes Claim More Lives



A significant rise in deaths linked to powerful synthetic opioids is gripping the UK's streets, new figures reveal. The National Crime Agency reported 75 additional deaths within 11 weeks to 9 May 2024, totaling 176 fatalities since last June. Nitazenes, a group of potent synthetic opioids up to 500 times stronger than morphine, have been detected in various drugs, including heroin, cocaine, and counterfeit prescription anxiety medications like Xanax and Valium.

Deaths related to nitazenes have been reported across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Notably, two prisoners, Giuseppe Tabone and Andrew Evans, died at HMP Lewes after smoking isotonitazene-contaminated drugs in 2022. Experts warn that the actual death toll could be higher due to slow detection and testing processes.

In response, the UK government is expanding access to the overdose reversal drug naloxone and plans to ban additional synthetic opioids. Meanwhile, former government drug tsar Mike Trace has called for urgent action to enhance testing services and public awareness to prevent a US-style opioid epidemic.

Reports indicate that nitazenes are being smuggled into the UK from China, hidden in everyday items and advertised on social media platforms. Law enforcement and public health agencies are closely monitoring the situation to mitigate the growing threat.