

# Toronto's Drug Checking Service

## An update on benzodiazepines in Toronto's unregulated fentanyl supply

March 4, 2026

Since late January, [Toronto's Drug Checking Service](#) has observed a sharp increase in the number of fentanyl samples containing benzodiazepine-related drugs. While the combination of high-potency opioids and benzodiazepine-related drugs (i.e., benzo-dope) is not new, in February:

1. Over 40% of fentanyl samples contained a benzodiazepine-related drug (we have not observed this degree of benzodiazepine contamination since October 2024)
2. Almost all fentanyl samples containing a benzodiazepine-related drug also contained [medetomidine](#) (samples have more commonly contained one or the other)

Benzodiazepine-related drugs found in fentanyl samples checked since late January include [ethylbromazolam](#), [desalkylgidazepam](#), [ethylflualprazolam](#), [bromazolam](#), [deschlorodemethyldiazepam](#), [desmethyflutiazepam](#), [flualprazolam](#), and [nordiazepam](#). For most of these benzodiazepine-related drugs, very little is known about their strength or the duration of their effects, particularly when they are used in combination with other central nervous system and/or respiratory depressants.

In July 2025, we released [What's going on with benzo-dope in Toronto?](#), sharing that veterinary tranquilizers, particularly medetomidine, appeared to be replacing benzodiazepine-related drugs in Toronto's unregulated fentanyl supply. Each month from May – December 2025, only 14% of fentanyl samples contained benzodiazepine-related drugs on average (compared to 67% that contained medetomidine).

Toronto's volatile unregulated fentanyl supply appears to yet again be undergoing a notable shift. Using high-potency opioids, benzodiazepine-related drugs, and medetomidine – all of which are central nervous system and/or respiratory depressants – in combination:

- Increases the risk of harms, particularly overdose and extreme sedation
- Increases the risk of dangerous suppression of vitals, such as slowing down of breathing, blood pressure, heart rate
- Complicates overdose response

We are sharing this update as regions throughout Ontario, such as [Toronto](#), [Windsor-Essex](#), [Chatham-Kent](#), and [Sudbury](#), are reporting rising fatal and non-fatal overdoses. We suspect these increases may be associated with the growing presence of benzodiazepine-related drugs alongside medetomidine and high-

potency opioids in the unregulated fentanyl supply. We are observing similar trends in fentanyl samples collected in other regions participating in our provincial public health and safety program, including Kingston and Peterborough.

If you suspect an opioid-related overdose involving medetomidine and/or benzodiazepine-related drugs, use naloxone and prioritize breathing. Naloxone alone may not make someone responsive if medetomidine and/or benzodiazepine-related drugs are contaminating their fentanyl.

We are continuing to monitor this trend and will keep the community informed as we learn more. To interact with our data, visit [www.drugchecking.community](http://www.drugchecking.community).

**Our community-led unregulated drug marketing monitoring program is the most timely, comprehensive, and accessible source of information on the unregulated drug supply. This information is crucial for people who use drugs and those who provide care and services to them. Recognizing the necessity for all communities to understand their local drug supply, our goal is to offer our service throughout the province.**

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**About Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community:** Ontario's Drug Checking Community, for which Toronto's Drug Checking Service is the flagship program, is a national leader in drug checking service delivery and community-led unregulated drug market monitoring and education. This public health and safety program offers the most precise, timely, and accessible information on the unregulated drug supply to reduce harm and inform evidence-based responses to the worsening toxic opioid supply crisis.

Collection site members in Toronto: Casey House | Fred Victor | Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre (Parkdale site) | South Riverdale Community Health Centre (Moss Park site) | Street Health | The Neighbourhood Group (Kensington Market Overdose Prevention Site) | Toronto Shelter and Support Services (Harm Reduction Unit)

Analysis site members: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Clinical Laboratory and Diagnostic Services) | St. Michael's Hospital (Department of Laboratory Medicine and Drug Checking Unit)

Our program is coordinated by a small central team that operates from within the Drug Checking Unit at St. Michael's Hospital.

**Our work would not be possible if people who use drugs did not donate their drugs to our program in an effort to reduce the harms associated with using unregulated substances and facilitate community-led drug market monitoring and education.**

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