

Drug deaths linked to synthetics made in China

Scotland has suffered an unusually high number of deaths linked to new synthetic drugs mainly made in China, a report has revealed.

Police Scotland warn Scotland is “disproportionately impacted” per head of population in relation to the number of nitazene-related deaths in the UK.

Nitazene is a highly potent synthetic opioid which is mixed into street drugs such as heroin. Users are said to be “playing Russian roulette” as they have no idea if their dealers have mixed them into the products they are peddling.

A Police Scotland quarterly report said that while their prevalence is “currently low” the potentially lethal synthetic opioids have been detected in various drugs being sold illegally across Scotland and in a number of fatalities.

It says: “Scotland currently is disproportionately impacted per head of population regarding nitazene/xylazine related deaths in the UK.

“The majority of nitazenes are manufactured in China and were first detected in European drug markets in 2019 and in Scotland in 2021.

“Public Health Scotland advise that the drug has been detected in numerous locations throughout Scotland and is several hundred times more potent than heroin and 20 times more potent than other synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

“This means that a very small quantity is required to create the desired effect, with a high risk of respiratory problems, depression and death.

“The drug is also administered in various different ways. Nitazenes are found to be commonly mixed with other drugs, including heroin.

“The potency of nitazenes increases the risk of overdose by users seeking higher strength drugs, with many unaware of the presence of the nitazenes within their supply.

“Police Scotland is working alongside partner agencies to tackle the threat posed to our communities by all drugs, including nitazenes.”

The report says the force’s efforts include improving information sharing between Public Health Scotland, Scottish Ambulance Service and Police Scotland regarding non-fatal overdoses.

Further analysis aims to improve resource allocation and the introduction of a “more effective and efficient referral pathway enabling appropriate partner intervention and support”.

The report adds: “Through the carrying of naloxone by all officers, promoting support services to people with addiction and their families, and our public health approach in substance harm and prevention we aim to better the lives of people with addiction and safeguard them from harmful drugs such as nitazene.

“Police Scotland are continually working to establish the source of nitazenes, routes of importations, confirming adulteration points and determining whether there is a co-ordinated supply of these prohibited substances into Scotland.”

The National Crime Agency revealed in May that the drugs had been linked to around 176 deaths across the UK with 47 of those in Scotland.