

Nitazenes

Nitazenes are highly potent synthetic opioids that require multiple doses of naloxone to reverse the effects.

Nitazenes may also be sold as counterfeit medicines reported to be oxycodone or benzodiazepines such as alprazolam.

Example of counterfeit oxycodone tablets containing nitazenes Protonitazene & Etonitazepine.



In the West Midlands there is currently a shortage of heroin and suppliers / dealers have been mixing nitazenes with other drugs. This has led to a number of deaths over the last couple of weeks, but we are also starting to see positive cases from other areas in UK.

Nitazene testing

Nitazenes cannot be detected using conventional toxicology screening methods for opiates/opioids. We now have available in toxicology a highly sensitive targeted method using tandem mass spectrometry (UPLC-MS/MS) to aid with diagnosis and monitoring.

If you require analysis, please can you ensure you include on the request form Nitazene screening and any clinical details e.g., number of naloxone doses given. If possible, can you also notify the laboratory of any urgent specimens.

Specimens

Collected as close to admission as possible:

- Minimum of 2 ml random urine collected into a plain white container.
- Minimum of 2 ml of EDTA whole blood



The detection window in urine is yet to be determined but is at least 3 days.

Send samples at ambient temperature. Samples are stable at 4°C for up to 1 week and -20°C for 1 month.

For suspect materials including powder, pills and vape liquids for transportation please transfer to a plain white container. For further advice including precautions for handling please contact the laboratory.

Contact Points

Toxicology laboratory

Tel: 0121 507 4138

Email: swbh.toxicology@nhs.net

Opening times weekdays 8:30am to 17:00pm

Weekends Bank Holiday: closed.

Dr Loretta Ford

Consultant Clinical Scientist

Tel: 0121 507 6026

Email: loretta.ford@nhs.net

Mailing Address

Department of Clinical Biochemistry

City Hospital

Dudley road

Birmingham

B18 7QH