

NITAZENES: AN EMERGING THREAT OF A DIVERSE GROUP OF SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS

- Nitazenes are synthetic opioids similar to fentanyl but can match or surpass the potency of fentanyl.
 - When combined with fentanyl, the effects of both drugs are compounded, which significantly increases the chances of a fatal overdose.
 - Similar to other synthetic opioids, nitazenes can only be properly identified in a sample after laboratory testing. Users will not realize they are buying nitazenes until it is too late.
- While nitazenes are a dangerous class of synthetic substances, the current magnitude of the threat is relatively small compared to that of fentanyl, which dominates the U.S. opioid market.
 - Since January 2020, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) forensic laboratories have analyzed 1,048 drug exhibits that contained some type of nitazene.
 - During the same time frame, by comparison, DEA has analyzed approximately 36,000 fentanyl powder exhibits, and approximately 24,000 fentanyl tablet exhibits.
- Chemical suppliers mainly located in China introduce new nitazenes or analogues when the currently used ones become riskier to produce due to regulatory actions and drug scheduling, or users look for novel substances that are not yet illegal.
 - Nitazenes are most likely being shipped as finished substances in small amounts in mail parcels from vendors in China to distributors or end users in the United States.

Figure 1: Powder Nitazene Sample (Isotonitazene)



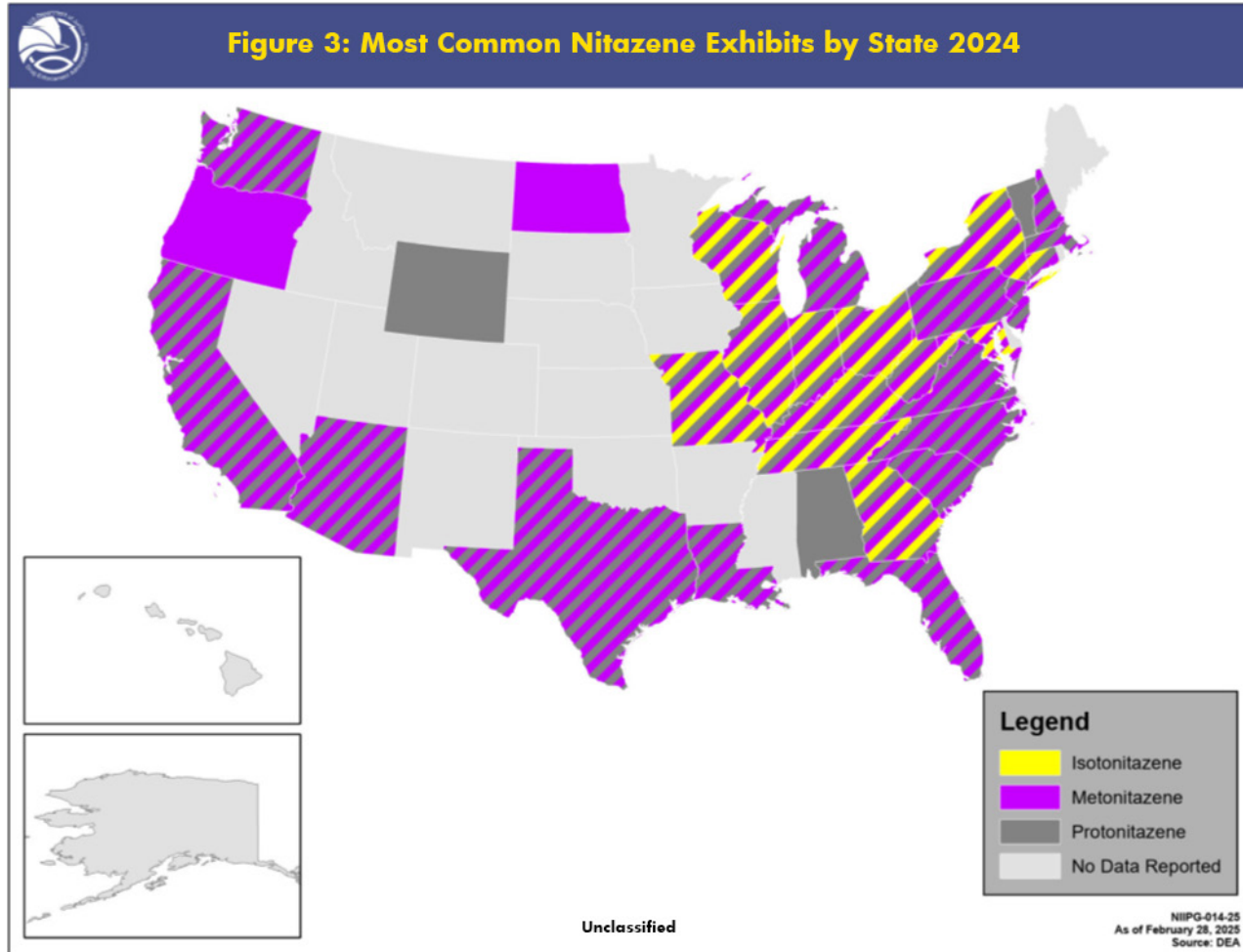
Source: DEA

Figure 2: Fake Dilaudid “M-8” Pills Containing Isotonitazene



Source: DEA

- Nitazenes are unlikely to replace fentanyl due to their complex synthesis pathways but likely will continue to be sporadically encountered in drug mixtures packaged or tableted by domestic distributors.
- DEA's Office of Forensic Sciences reported that isotonitazene, metonitazene, and protonitazene have been the most identified nitazene substances in the United States in the past five years.
- DEA identified 19 distinct nitazenes in the past five years.



Most Exhibits of Isotonitazene	Maryland - 30 Exhibits
Most Exhibits of Metonitazene	Florida - 69 Exhibits
Most Exhibits of Protonitazene	Florida - 96 Exhibits
Most Exhibits of ALL Nitazene Compounds	Florida - 209 Exhibits

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