

PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH SNAPSHOT



INSIDE BRITISH COLUMBIA'S STREET OPIOID SUPPLY

2021–2023 Drug Checking Data Reveal Dangerous Shifts

OBJECTIVES

Identify what substances are in unregulated opioids in B.C.

Track how often
fentanyl, analogues,
and benzodiazepines
appear

Measure drug
strength and
see how it
changes over
time

Show how local drug
checking can inform
public health and
safety



MAPS
CANADA

METHODS



- **Location:**
Victoria, B.C.

- **Timeline:**
**January 2021 –
December 2023**

- **Samples submitted:**
8,122 suspected opioids

- **Technologies:**
**Paper-Spray Mass
Spectrometry (PS-
MS)
Fourier-Transform
Infrared (FTIR)
Immunoassay
strips**

KEY FINDINGS

WHAT WAS FOUND IN THE SAMPLES

88%

OF SAMPLE CONTAINED
FENTANYL OR
ANALOGUES

49%

CONTAIN
BENZODIAZEPINES

HEROIN
DETECTED
IN ONLY

4%

FLUOROFENTANYL
NOW FOUND IN

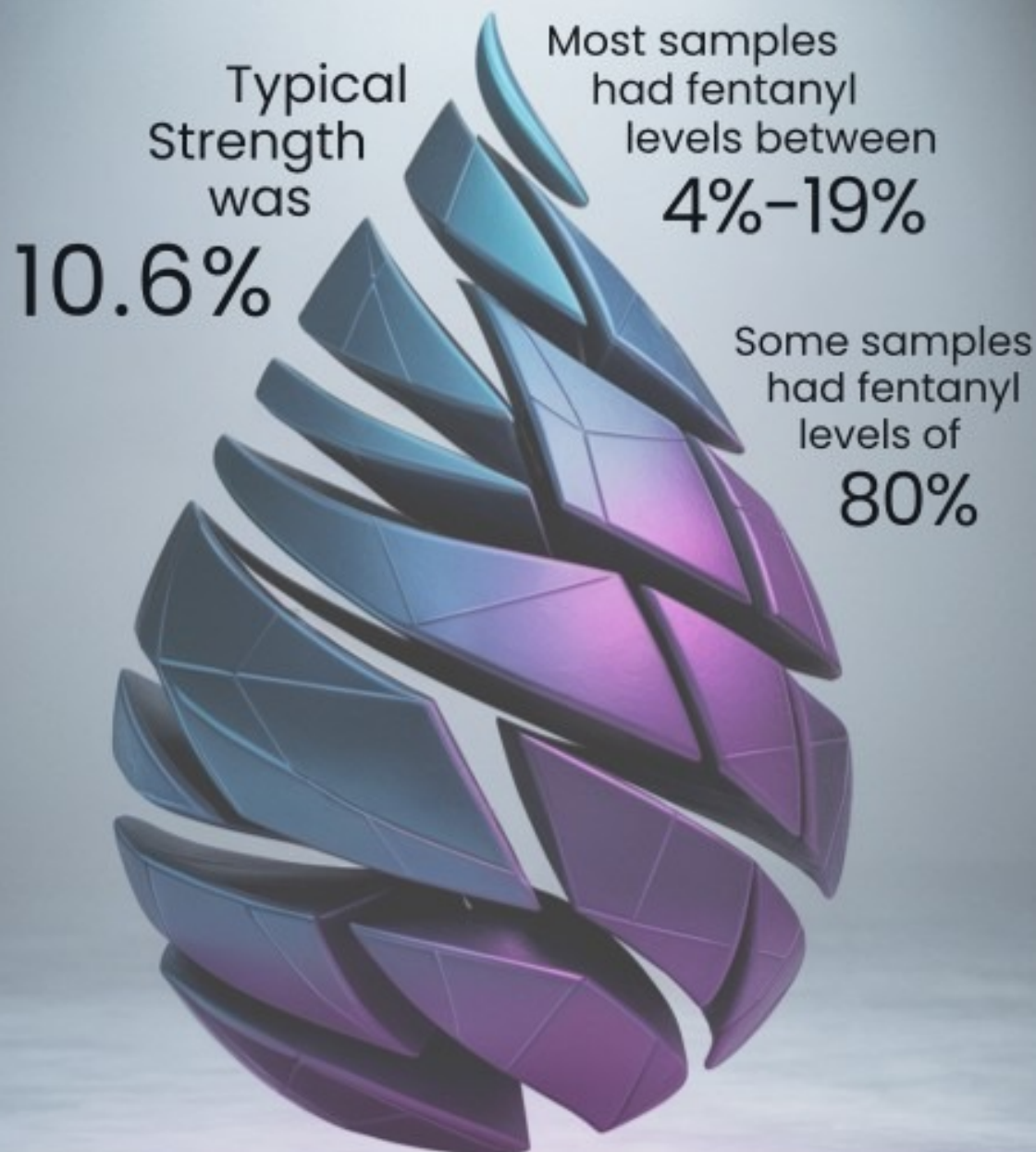
70%



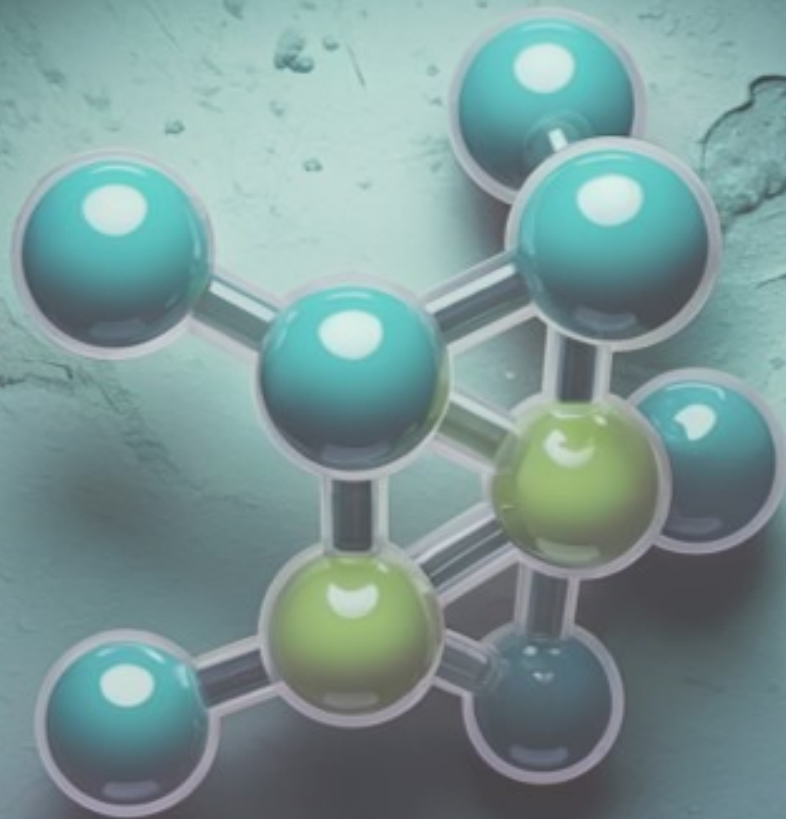
MAPS
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KEY FINDINGS

HOW STRONG WAS THE **FENTANYL?**



KEY FINDINGS



Fluorofentanyl: A potent new addition

Was rare in 2021

Found in 70% of samples in 2023

Sometimes the only opioid present

Other times, mixed with fentanyl

KEY FINDINGS

BENZODIAZEPINES

Benzodiazepines
prolong sedation,
making overdose
reversal harder.

Half of opioid
samples also
had benzos

Benzos don't
respond to
naloxone



WHY THIS MATTERS



- People can't tell strength by look or taste
- Drug checking can detect what's in the supply
- Stronger drugs = higher overdose risk
- Unpredictable drug mixes raise overdose risks
- Naloxone may not work on all substances
- Real-time data helps public health respond quickly



MAPS
CANADA

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Street opioids in B.C. are complex and dangerous
- New drugs like fluorofentanyl and bromazolam are rising
- Many overdoses involve multiple drugs
- Local drug checking is key to tracking changes, saving lives, and guiding safer supply programs



CITATION



Not just fentanyl: Understanding the complexities of the unregulated opioid supply through results from a drug checking service in British Columbia, Canada

Gonzalez-Nieto, P., Wallace, B., Kielty, C., et al. (2025)

International Journal of Drug Policy, 138, 104751

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2025.104751>

