

NHSGGC Drug harms briefing: Rapid onset overdoses

This briefing provides an update to the previous one issued by NHSGGC on 06/03/25



Audience

This briefing note is for:

- People who provide services to people who use drugs
- People who use drugs and their friends and families

Situation

Reports continue to be received from within Greater Glasgow and Clyde and elsewhere of **rapid onset overdoses** involving features such as respiratory depression and unresponsiveness occurring within moments of injecting drugs. Several of these overdoses have required treatment with repeated doses of naloxone and some have resulted in hospital admission or death.

Testing of equipment used for preparing heroin for injection in Glasgow city has indicated the presence of a nitazene (highly potent synthetic opioid) in some samples, including at least one associated with a rapid onset overdose.

Although not conclusive, this does suggest that nitazenes could be causing these rapid onset overdoses. Further information about nitazenes can be found here: [Nitazenes: SDF Launch Alert and Information Resources for People at Risk of Overdose - Scottish Drugs Forum](#).

Actions to take

1. Make your staff aware of this briefing note.
2. Ensure that your service has adequate supplies of naloxone in place. Naloxone training and supplies can be accessed via this link: [Naloxone Explained — Stop The Deaths](#). You can also contact your local Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services (ADRS) team if you need help with accessing naloxone. Community pharmacies also hold supplies of naloxone which can be accessed during an emergency.
3. Use every available opportunity to:
 - Inform people who use drugs that there are currently numerous reports of people experiencing rapid onset and often severe overdoses following the injection of drugs, and that it is possible this is due to contamination of the drug supply with nitazenes.
 - Remind people who use drugs of the general harm reduction measures outlined overleaf.
4. Consider placing information about measures to reduce the risk of overdose in prominent locations in your service. Useful resources can be found here: [Stop The Deaths](#).
5. If someone you are working with experiences unusual effects from their drugs, encourage and support them to submit a sample to WEDINOS for testing: [WEDINOS - Welsh Emerging Drugs & Identification of Novel Substances Project](#). Information about the effects experienced and the sample barcode should be sent by email to mhead@ggc.scot.nhs.uk so that we can track the results. Please also use this email address if you need any information or advice about helping service users to submit samples to WEDINOS.
6. Please inform your ADP coordinator (or your service manager) and email mhead@ggc.scot.nhs.uk if you:
 - Observe or become aware of any unusually rapid onset overdoses or an unusually high number of drug overdoses amongst your service users, or
 - Have any other information that you think is relevant and would like to share.

Key information for people who use drugs in Greater Glasgow and Clyde

There have been numerous recent reports from in the Glasgow area and elsewhere in Scotland of people overdosing almost immediately after injecting drugs. It is possible that this is caused by contamination of the drug supply with nitazenes, which are extremely potent synthetic opioids.

People who take drugs – including but not just people who take heroin – should do the following to keep safe and reduce their risk of overdosing:

- **Avoid unfamiliar supplies** of drugs.
- When taking drugs, **start at a low dose** and **avoid mixing** with other drugs or with alcohol or medicines.
- **Don't use drugs alone:** make sure there are people around who can keep an eye on you and respond if you overdose.
- Make sure that you and the people around you have **naloxone** and know how to use it. Naloxone is available from Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services, injecting equipment and participating community pharmacies. Multiple doses of naloxone may be needed.
- When taking heroin, consider smoking it rather than injecting it. You can obtain foil for smoking heroin from local Injecting Equipment Providers.
- People who inject drugs in Glasgow city centre are invited and encouraged to use the **Thistle service** (Glasgow's safer drug consumption facility). At the Thistle service you can inject drugs in a safe environment and can also access other services if you want to. The Thistle is located at 55 Hunter Street, Glasgow, G4 0UP and is 9am to 9pm every day, 365 days of the year. You don't need an appointment.

If someone you are with has an overdose or becomes unresponsive after taking drugs, **dial 999 for an ambulance and administer naloxone.**