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## **Exercise NITAZENE**

## **Hyfforddiant NITAZENE**

Exploring the response to an increase in harms relating to the emergence of synthetic opioid into the drug markets across our communities in Wales

## **Briefing Pack**

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024

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## Distribution List

This briefing pack has been distributed to the following Area Planning Boards (APBs):

- Gwent
- North Wales
- Cwm Taf
- Dyfed
- Powys
- Western Bay
- Cardiff & Vale

...with the expectation that the following from each APB should attend where available:

- APB Chairs
- Commissioners
- Harm Reduction Leads
- Police Force Representative
- Homelessness/Housing Representative
- ?

**NB.** Up to 10 persons per APB.

In addition, the briefing pack has been distributed to:

- Public Health Wales
- HM Prison & Probation Service

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## Introduction

On the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023, UK Government announced that following advice from the [Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs \(ACMD\)](#), 15 new dangerous synthetic opioids would become Class A drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

14 of these are nitazenes with the remaining drug being buprenorphine. On 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024, the UK Government also accepted the ACMD's advice to add a generic definition for nitazenes. This will mean new nitazenes detected in the UK will automatically be controlled as Class A drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Many of these substances are incredibly dangerous, being 50 to 100 times more potent, and have similar effects to heroin and fentanyl, posing a higher risk of accidental overdose.

This has become a widespread problem in other countries, and the United Kingdom is also experiencing an increase in the use of synthetic opioids, with increasing awareness of the potential threats posed, and the risk of increased drug related deaths.

## Situation in Wales

Monitoring emerging threats and ensuring individuals and organisations are aware of them is a key part of the substance misuse agenda in Wales.

Wales has seen a number of nitazenes-implicated deaths, including a cluster in Cardiff, and more recently at HMP Parc which were the subject of extensive media coverage.

In December 2023, Public Health Wales (PHW) issued a [press release](#) with Welsh public health experts in the UK's only national drug testing service are warning that people may not be getting what they think they are getting when buying benzodiazepines.

### **This document has been split into three distinct parts:**

**Part One** sets out the aim and objectives of the exercise, capturing the requirements of all involved with planning and delivering this event.

**Part Two** describes how the exercise element of this event was researched. It continues by detailing the background to the chosen scenario and describing the format of the event.

**Part Three** lists the resources that will be required for the event.

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## 1.0 Part One

**Part One sets out the aims and objectives of the exercise, capturing the requirements of all involved with planning and delivering this event.**

### 1.1 Aim

The aim of the exercise is to explore the response to an increase in harms relating to the emergence of synthetic opioid into the drug markets across our communities in Wales.

### 1.2 Objectives

- To discuss procedures, capabilities, and readiness to recognise and respond to the emergence of synthetic opioid into the drug markets across our communities in Wales.
- To ensure that responding organisations understand their role in response.
- To ensure an effective and co-ordinated approach is taken to by all agencies - from initial detection, throughout a response and in reviewing lessons identified.
- To promote discussion on the issues that are highlighted throughout the exercise.
- To highlight opportunities for continual improvement.

### 1.3 Scope

This exercise seeks to involve and engage multi-agency partners across Wales to respond to a scenario and associated injects. They will be encouraged to draw upon past experiences to effectively respond to an increase in harms relating to the emergence of synthetic opioid into the drug markets across our communities in Wales.

The facilitators will encourage the participants to discuss issues, highlight pertinent concerns, and integrate them appropriately into their collective response.

The exercise will seek to develop and enhance the ability of multi-agency partners to respond effectively to the emergence of synthetic opioid into the drug markets across our communities in Wales.

Whilst this will help to inform the overall effectiveness of the multi-agency partnership response; it is not designed to test individual officers or agencies.

The exercise should not be viewed as a singular event aiming to satisfy the training needs and requirements of the multi-agency partners. Instead, participants should use this opportunity to consolidate their existing knowledge and identify areas for improvement both personally and organisationally.

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## 2.0 Programme

**Part Two describes how the exercise element of this event was researched. It continues by detailing the background to the chosen scenario and describing the format of the event.**

### 2.1 Research Methods

To ensure that the scenario that has been developed for the exercise is as realistic as possible, advice has been taken from the multi-agency partners and sources with specialist knowledge of the components that have led to an increase in harms relating to the emergence of synthetic opioid into the drug markets across our communities in Wales.

The exercise will take the form of a virtual tabletop/seminar style event which is a widely practiced and cost-effective process. The exercise will take place in the controlled and safe environment, with an imaginary incident and a carefully written scenario.

This type of exercise can be very advantageous allowing:

- The use of infinitely variable formats.
- Scenarios to be tailored to achieve the exercise aims.
- Exercise Coordinators to control the exercise and inject information.
- A number of players/observers to experience the exercise.
- All players have an opportunity to contribute.

### 2.2 Background to the Chosen Scenario

The exercise uses a fictitious event which has been set in 2024 in your region of Wales, based on a reasonable worst-case scenario.

It will focus on an escalating number of harms thought to be the result of synthetic opioid across a range of community settings requiring a multiagency response.

It is anticipated that the exercise may highlight the requirement for arrangements relating to Wales level coordination, but it is not intended to engage Civil Contingencies structures.

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## 2.3 Exercise Format

There will be a series of scenario stages and plenary sessions providing opportunity to highlight issues as they arise.

The Emergency Preparedness, Resilience & Response Team for Public Health Wales will facilitate the event.

The exercise will be broken up into approximately four stages. The questions which will be asked at each stage of the scenario have been carefully designed to provoke discussion amongst participants.

## 2.4 Exercise Programme

- **0900 - 0902hrs**     **Opening Remarks**
- **0900 – 0912hrs**     **Keynote Presentation:**
- **0912 - 0915hrs**     **Exercise Brief (Delegates)**
- 0915 - 0920hrs     Introduction
- 0920 - 0950hrs     **Stage One**
- 0950 - 1020hrs     **Stage Two**
- 1020 - 1030hrs     Comfort Break
- 1030 - 1100hrs     **Stage Three**
- 1100 - 1130hrs     **Stage Four**
- 1130 – 1150hrs     Debrief
- 1150 - 1200hrs     **Closing Remarks**  
(Fill Out Evaluation Forms)

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## 3.0 Part Three

**Part Three lists the resources that will be required for the event.**

### 3.1 Virtual Platform

The exercise will take place via Microsoft Teams. Please refer to the link in your diary marker or [click this link](#).

### 3.2 Breakout Rooms

Participants will be split into breakout rooms for each stage of the scenario to discuss the issues highlighted, and answer the questions posed.

**NB.** It is essential that attendance is confirmed at the earliest opportunity to ensure that participants can be allocated to breakout rooms appropriately.

### 3.3 Room Support/Scribe

Each breakout room will have a support/scribe to capture the detail discussed.

### 3.4 Further Information

Should additional information be required, please do not hesitate to contact the Emergency Preparedness, Resilience & Response Team.

**Tel:** 07817 019304

**Email:** [phw.epr@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:phw.epr@wales.nhs.uk)

### 3.5 Useful Documents and Reference Material

- **UK Government Guidance: Guidance for local areas on planning to deal with potent synthetic opioids.**

This guidance explains how local commissioners and service providers can prepare for and respond to incidents involving potent synthetic opioids like nitazenes or fentanyl. ([link](#))

- **News Article: Deadly opioids smuggled into UK in dog food, BBC learns.**

Nitazenes - more deadly than heroin - have recently been linked to nearly three UK deaths a week on average. The BBC also found the drugs were being offered for sale on social media platforms including X and SoundCloud... ([link](#))

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- **News Article: Parc prison inmates told to throw away drugs after jail deaths.**

Police said four of the deaths were believed to be drug-related, while two were being treated as non-suspicious. John Rose and Jason Hussey both died at the jail on 27 February, while Christopher Stokes died on 9 March. The three other people who have died at the prison have not yet been named... [\(link\)](#)

- **News Article: Police fear rapid rise in deaths from super-strength opioid which is already claiming lives in Wales.**

A Welsh police force chief says there is a risk that deaths involving nitazenes - a new deadly drug - could rise "exponentially" over the coming weeks and months. Sixteen deaths related to the synthetic opioid have been recorded in the South Wales and Gwent force areas since December 2023. [\(link to interview, ITV Wales\)](#)