



Substance Use Trend *Alert*

December 2022

Benzodiazepine Misuse in the U.S. and Florida

Benzodiazepines are prescribed to help with anxiety, insomnia, muscle spasms, and reduce seizures.¹ They are a class of depressant drugs that can cause drowsiness or relaxed mood.¹ Co-abuse of benzodiazepines with alcohol or other substances is dangerous but mixing benzodiazepines with opioids to enhance euphoria can be lethal.¹ Combining benzodiazepines with opioids can increase the risk of overdose since both cause sedation and decreased breathing.³ A study indicated that the overdose death rate for individuals who are prescribed opioids and benzodiazepines was 10 times higher than among those who only take opioids.³ Illicit benzodiazepines combined with fentanyl – referred to as benzo-dope – is a new trend in the opioid epidemic that is particularly dangerous because Narcan is ineffective against benzodiazepines.²

Benzodiazepine Misuse in the U.S.

The illicit benzodiazepine supply in the U.S. has increased since 2019.⁴ From April through June 2019 to April through June 2020, prescription and illicit benzodiazepine-involved deaths increased 21.8% and 519.6% respectively.⁴ From January through June 2020, 92.7% of benzodiazepine-involved deaths also involved opioids.⁴ In 2020, 4.8 million people 12 and older in the U.S. misused prescription benzodiazepines in the past year.⁵ The highest misuse was among young adults 18-25.⁵ Since 2018, new novel psychoactive substances (NPS) have been analyzed throughout the U.S. to showcase emerging drug trends for public health and safety actions.⁶ In 2021, more than 2,700 NPS were observed with the majority being benzodiazepines shown in Figure 1.⁶

Benzodiazepine Misuse in Florida

The most frequent occurring drugs among decedents in Florida after alcohol and fentanyl were

benzodiazepines.⁷ There were 4,195 benzodiazepine occurrences in 2021.⁷ The most frequently misused benzodiazepine in Florida is alprazolam with 1,568 occurrences in 2021.⁷ In 2016, only 25% of deaths with alprazolam had fentanyl co-occurring at the time of death.⁸ In 2020, 68% of deaths with alprazolam had fentanyl co-occurring at the time of death.⁸ The Florida Poison Control Centers reports benzodiazepines as the most common drug category for calls with 2,741 exposures.⁹

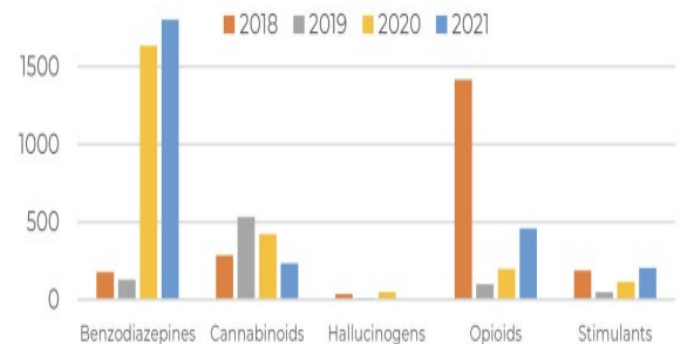


Figure 1: Novel Psychoactive Substances detected in sample U.S. populations Source: [CFSRE](#)

Recommendations

It is recommended that clinicians use caution when prescribing benzodiazepines with opioids.³ The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has warning labels on both prescription opioids and benzodiazepines due to the potential dangers of using these drugs together.³ New or emerging benzodiazepines should be tested in death investigation cases.³ This can help identify new and emerging illicit benzodiazepines to warn public health officials and other professionals involved in substance use treatment and prevention. For more information, please visit the following websites:

Additional Information Sources:

[Benzodiazepine Information Coalition: Resources](#)

[Florida Department of Children and Families Treatment for Substance Use](#)

[The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#)

References

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