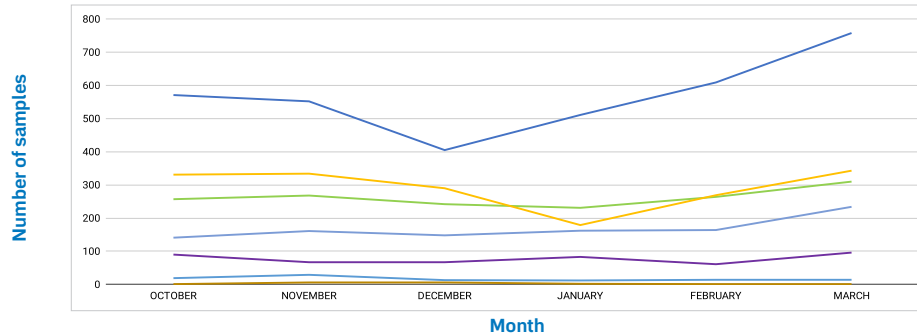


Key Findings

- March 2022 was the month with the most ever drugs checked at community drug checking sites (1,756).
- The percentage of opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines across BC drug checking sites (35.5%) remained high. The true rate may be higher than reported here because etizolam, the predominant benzodiazepine in expected opioids, may be missed by drug checking technologies.
- There may be an ongoing shift from benzodiazepine-adulteration of opioids with etizolam to other benzodiazepines such as flualprazolam, flubromazolam, and flubromazepam, which are better detected with benzodiazepine test strips and cause the overall detection numbers to increase. These drugs are potent sedatives which can cause blackouts, memory loss, and make it difficult to tell when someone is experiencing opioid toxicity.
- The median fentanyl concentration of opioids checked was 13.5%, increasing from 13.3% last month. See page 3 for more detailed results.

Number of drug samples checked in the past 6 months



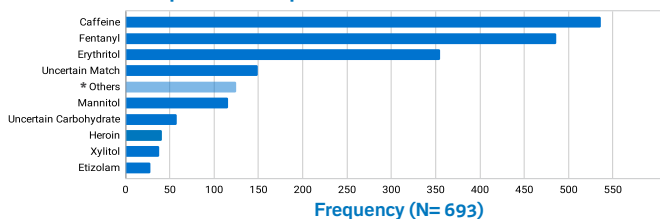
Number of samples by drug category in March

Opioid	758
Stimulant	310
Depressant	96
Psychedelic	343
Other	14
Polysubstance	1
Unknown	234

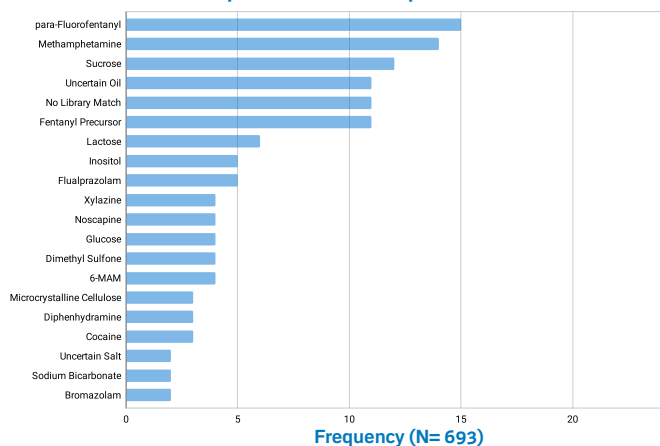
TOTAL: 1,756

Components found in drug samples in March

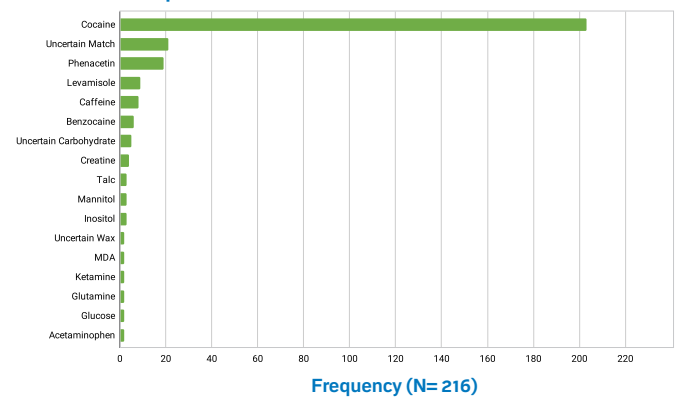
Components in opioids



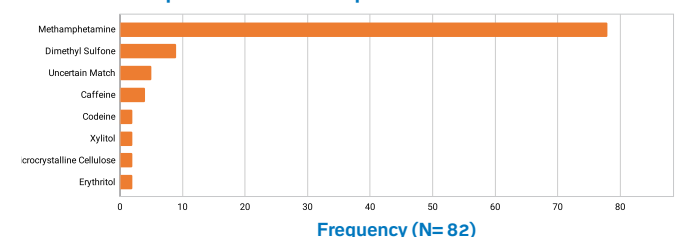
* Other components found in opioids



Components in cocaine

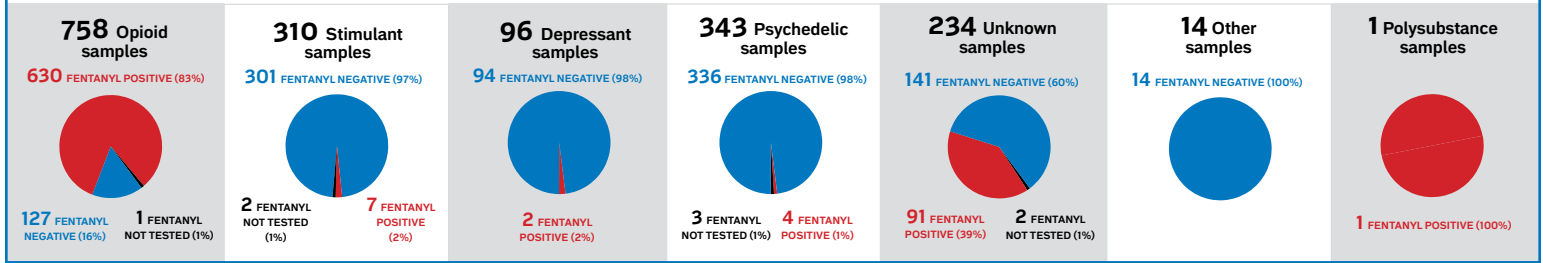


Components in methamphetamine



There were additional compounds detected a single time each. To save space, they have been omitted from these charts. For the full list of compounds detected, visit our data dashboard at www.drugcheckingbc.ca/dashboard/

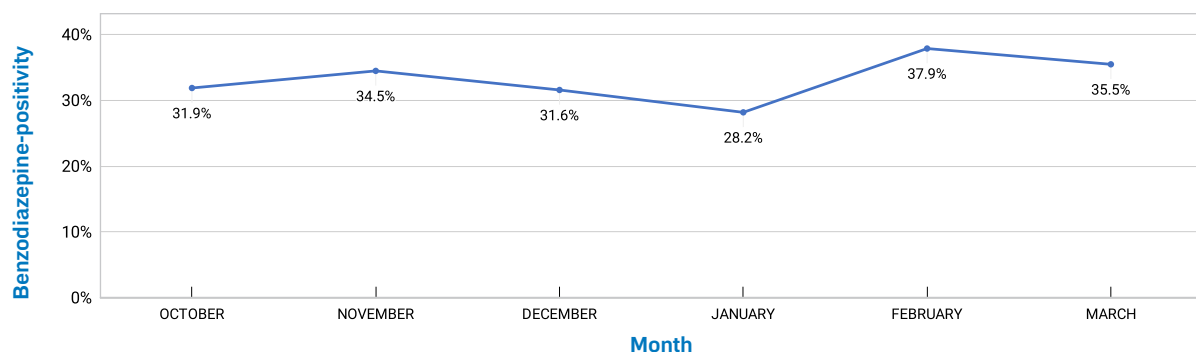
Number of samples tested with fentanyl present



PUBLIC HEALTH NOTIFICATIONS

Date & Location	Expected Drug	Drugs Detected	Fentanyl Strip	Benzo Strip	Area Purchased	Alert Message
March 25 2022 ASK Wellness Penticton	Down or fentanyl Grey pebbles	Caffeine, Erythritol, Fentanyl	Positive	Positive	Penticton	Higher than normal concentration of fentanyl in a sample adulterated with benzodiazepines poses a risk of opioid toxicity.
Health authorities and community organizations issue further toxic drug alerts from sources other than drug checking. See their respective websites or social media accounts for more alerts.						

Percentage of opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines in the past 6 months

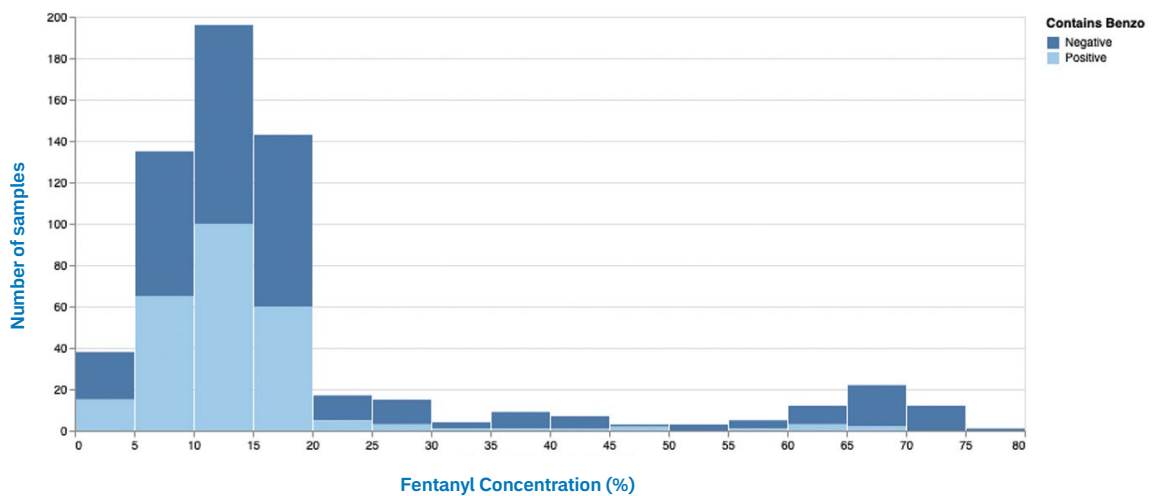


During the month of March, **35.5%** of expected opioid samples tested positive for benzodiazepines in our partner sites around BC (**269 samples of 758 checked**). Opioid samples are checked for benzodiazepine-positivity using BTNX test strips and the FTIR spectrometer. The results presented here are derived from both of these technologies and are presumptive until confirmed by a laboratory.

Fentanyl Quantification

The charts below summarize fentanyl concentrations of fentanyl-positive opioid samples brought for drug checking in British Columbia. Fentanyl concentrations were determined using FTIR and a calibrated fentanyl quantification model. Technicians at point-of-care may provide an estimated fentanyl quantification, generally an approximate range of fentanyl percentage in a mixture, but these results were calculated separately (post hoc) using the model for the purpose of this report.

Fentanyl Concentration of Opioid Drug Checking Samples in BC, March 2022



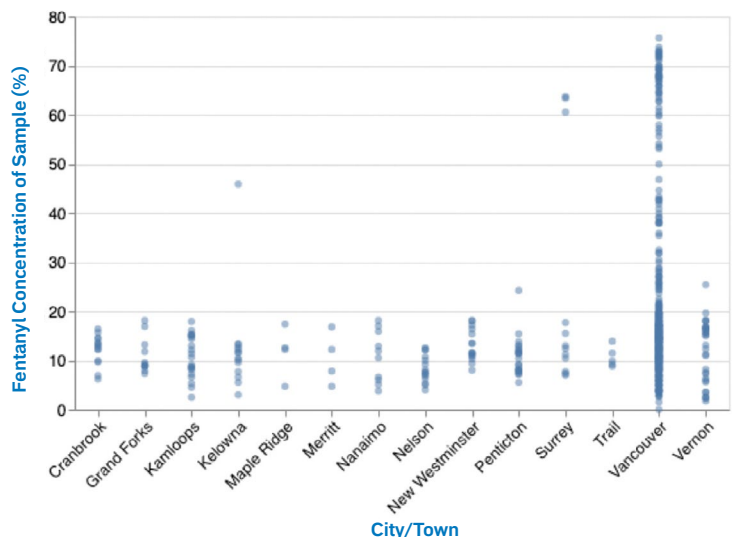
Four fifths of opioids checked (81%) have a concentration of fentanyl between 5% and 15%, but there remain many samples above 15% fentanyl-by-weight, and concentrations can approach 80% of the mixture. The median fentanyl concentration of all samples was 13.5%, up from 13.3% last month. When purchasing fentanyl from an unregulated drug supply, it is often impossible to know what the fentanyl concentration of the drugs is. Drug checking can help, but point-of-care quantification results are provided in a range since it's hard to be precise with the available technologies. For example, a technician might say, "This sample contains caffeine, mannitol, and between 5% and 10% fentanyl."

Drug supplies vary by location in the province. While samples from smaller communities appear to be more consistent, it is important to remember that this is a small number of drugs checked in each city or town. It is also important to note that these locations include only those participating in the BCCSU Drug Checking Project that provide data from FTIR spectroscopy. These numbers may not represent the broader supply or the supply in other settings.

It is very important to remember that the results presented here are fentanyl, not fentanyl analogues like carfentanyl. Carfentanyl is a potent opioid that is often present below the detection limit of the spectrometer and is therefore missed by point-of-care drug checking technologies. Your drug checking technician can explain the limitations in detail when you get your drugs checked, but always take additional harm reduction precautions, like using an OPS if available, because potent opioids may be presented and go undetected.

If you have any questions about the results, please email us at drugchecking@bccsu.ubc.ca.

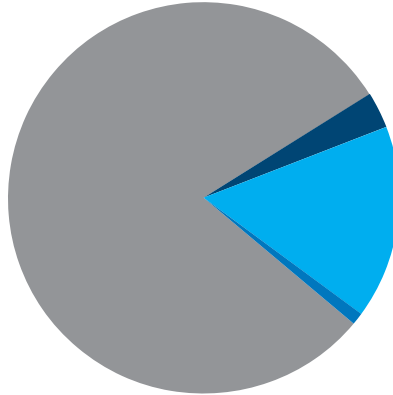
Fentanyl Concentration of Opioid Samples by City/Town, March 2022



Number of samples tested by region:

Total #: 1,756

1,398: Vancouver Coastal
Health region (80%)



52: Fraser Health region (3%)

283: Interior Health region (16%)

23: Vancouver Island
Health Region (1%)

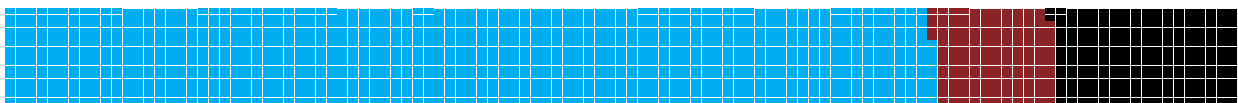
Number of samples that matched expectation

using FTIR/test strip drug checking

EXPECTED DRUG:	EXPECTED DRUG:	EXPECTED DRUG:	EXPECTED DRUG:
Depressant 96 Samples Tested Matched: 63 Did not match: 33	Psychedelic 343 Samples Tested Matched: 289 Did not match: 51 Match not determined: 3	Stimulant 310 Samples Tested Matched: 286 Did not match: 24	Other 14 Samples Tested Matched: 6 Did not match: 6 Match not determined: 2
Unknown 234 Samples Tested Match not determined: 234	Opioid 758 Samples Tested Matched: 685 Did not match: 54 Match not determined: 19	Polysubstance 1 Sample Tested Matched: 1	

Total

1,756 Samples Tested



Matched: 1,330

Did not match: 168

Match not determined: 258

Please note that the presence of the expected substance does not imply purity, as samples frequently contain adulterating cutting agents

Depressant may include:
benzodiazepines, etizolam,
GHB, hypnotics

Opioid may include:
"down," heroin, fentanyl,
pharmaceutical opioids

Polysubstance includes:
cross-category mixtures

Psychedelic may include:
MDMA and related,
2C-family, tryptamines,
ketamine, LSD

Stimulant may include:
methamphetamine,
"speed," cocaine and crack
cocaine, cathinones

Unknown includes:
samples where the individual
was unable to identify an
expected substance - this
includes found samples.

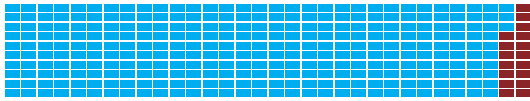
Number of opioid samples that matched expectation

using FTIR/test strip drug checking

EXPECTED DRUG:

Fentanyl

320 Samples Tested



Matched: 303
Did not match: 17

EXPECTED DRUG:

Heroin

45 Samples Tested



Matched: 32
Did not match: 13

EXPECTED DRUG:

Opium

21 Samples Tested

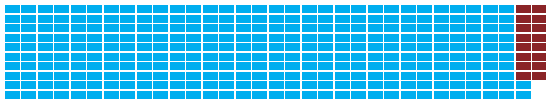


Matched: 21

EXPECTED DRUG:

Down

328 Samples Tested



Matched: 312
Did not match: 16

EXPECTED DRUG:

Pharmaceutical

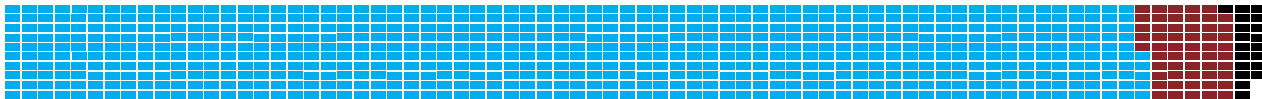
44 Samples Tested



Matched: 17
Did not match: 8
Match not determined: 19

Total

758 Samples Tested



Matched: 685
Did not match: 54
Match not determined: 19

Please note that the presence of the expected substance does not imply purity, as samples frequently contain adulterating cutting agents. 'Down' can refer to any opioid drug present in any amount.

Data represented here are collected from our partner sites across the province. Drug samples are tested using the Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectrometer in combination with fentanyl test strips and benzodiazepine test strips.

There is 5% fentanyl detection limit on the FTIR spectrometer (McCrae, 2019), and a drug check on any given sample consists of both the FTIR and BTNX fentanyl immunoassay test strip testing done in combination. When applicable, BTNX benzodiazepine immunoassay test strips are also used.

BCCSU gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following partners:



Health Canada
Santé Canada



BRITISH COLUMBIA



Canadian Mental Health Association

