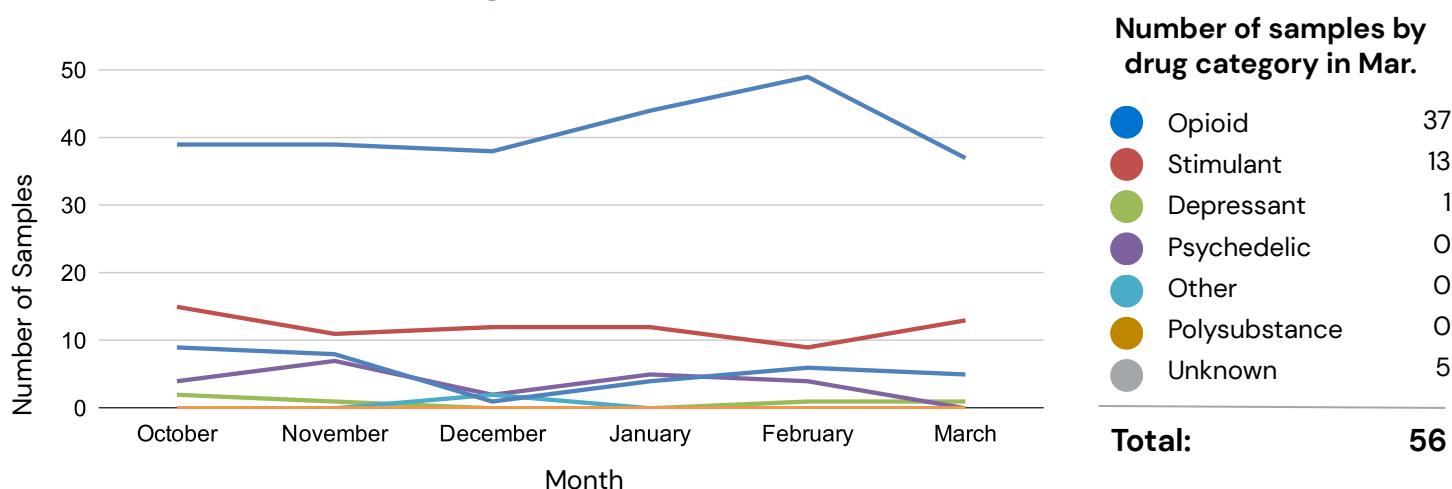




Key findings

- In March, **56** drug checks were performed by services offering FTIR drug checking in the Northern Health region (**7 access points**).
- The percentage of all opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines by FTIR and/or test strip increased to **40.5%**.
- We continue to monitor the emergence of novel benzodiazepines in unregulated opioids. In March, ethylbromazolam was detected by secondary testing.
- Drug checking services in the NH region are now using medetomidine test strips in response to the increase of medetomidine in the unregulated drug supply. Among opioid samples tested in March, **86.7%** were positive for medetomidine.
- Among opioids sent for **secondary testing** in March (**n=21**), medetomidine was detected in **10 samples**.
- Note that trends may be difficult to infer due to the smaller number of samples tested over a large geographic region.

Number of drug samples checked in the past 6 months



Number of drug checks at each site

Location	# of Drugs Checked
POUNDS (Prince George)	35
Terrace ICMT (Terrace)	11
Terrace ICMT (Smithers)	10
Total	56

Number of samples with the expected drug detected

Expected Drug	Detected	Not Detected	N/A	Total
Opioid	37	0	0	37
Stimulant	13	0	0	13
Depressant	0	1	0	1
Unknown	0	0	5	5
Total	50	1	5	56

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

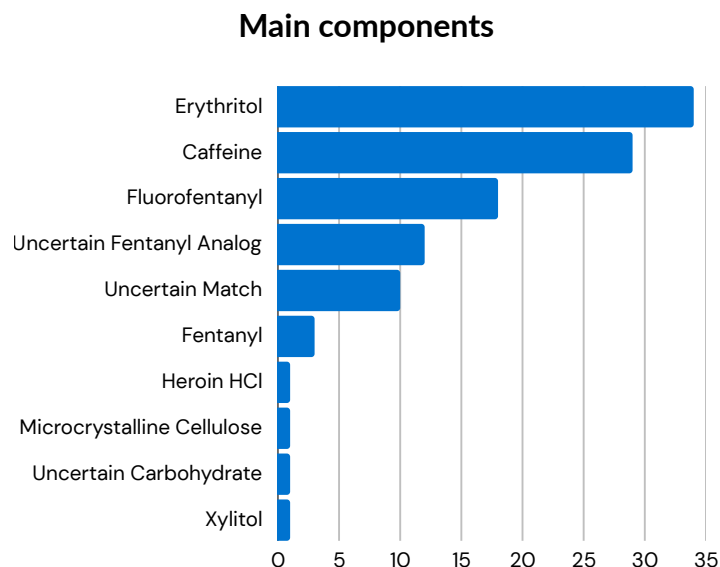
Opioids

Number of opioid samples with the expected drug detected

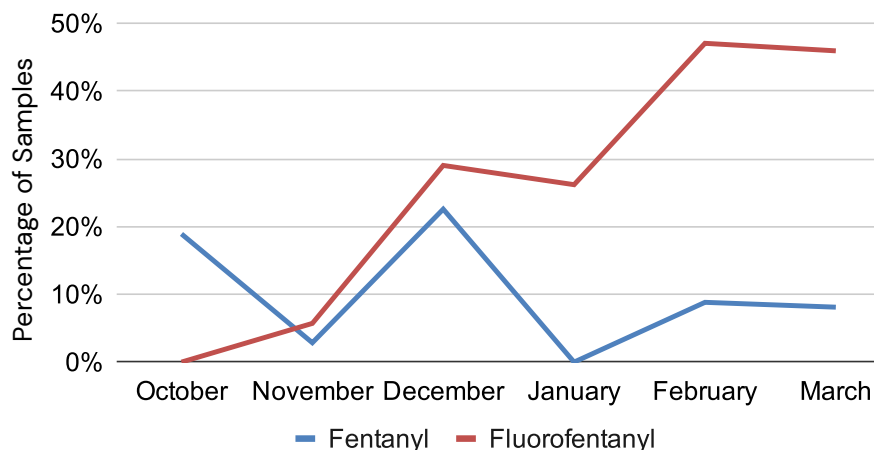
Expected Drug	Detected	Not Detected	N/A	Total
Fentanyl	13	0	0	13
Down	24	0	0	24
Total	37	0	0	37

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.

Components detected in unregulated opioids (N=37)

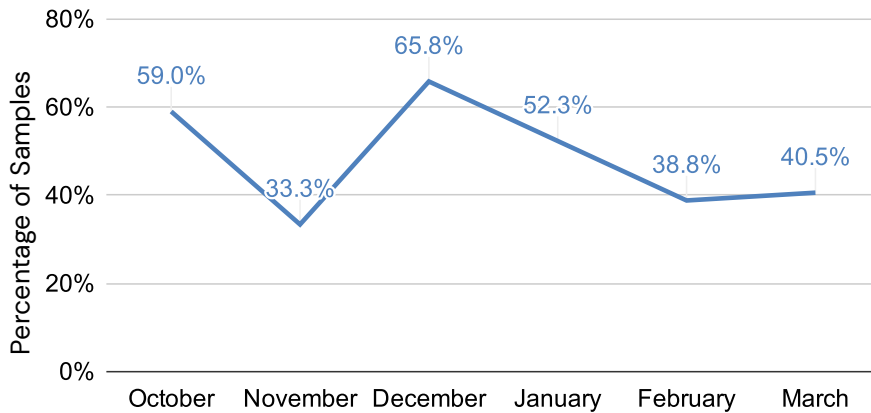


Fentanyl analogs detected in unregulated opioids, past 6 months



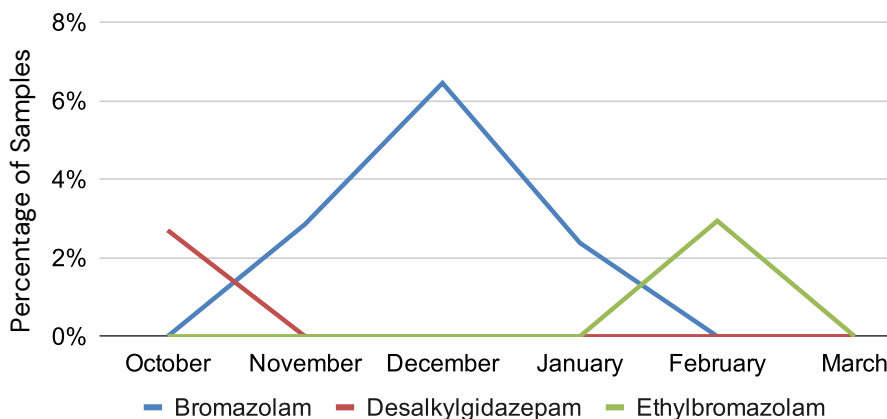
- In March, fluorofentanyl remained the most common opioid identified by FTIR, found in **45.9%** of unregulated opioids checked (**18 of 37 samples**), whereas fentanyl was detected in **8.1%** (**3 samples**). The decreasing number of fentanyl detections may indicate that less fentanyl is circulating in the opioid supply, and/or that it is present in concentrations below the FTIR detection limit (<5%).
- Carfentanil was not detected in the Northern Health region by FTIR this month, but continues to be found in samples sent for secondary testing in the province. Please see the **Secondary Testing** section of this report for more information.

Percentage of opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines, past 6 months



- During the month of March, **40.5%** of expected opioid samples tested positive for benzodiazepines in the Northern Health region (**15 samples of 37 checked**).
- Opioid samples are checked for benzodiazepine-positivity using BTNX test strips and the FTIR spectrometer. The true prevalence may be higher, as some benzodiazepines (e.g., etizolam, ethylflualprazolam) may be missed by test strip.

Types of benzodiazepines detected by FTIR, past 6 months



- In March, no benzodiazepines were detected by FTIR in expected opioid samples.
- Benzodiazepines were still detected in some expected opioid samples by test strips (see above), indicating benzodiazepines were in concentrations below FTIR limit of detection (>5%).
- We continue to monitor the emergence of novel benzodiazepines in the province. please see **Secondary Testing** section for more information

Percentage of opioids testing positive for medetomidine, past 6 months

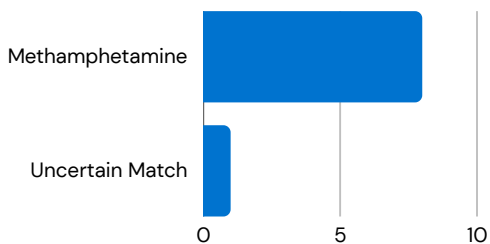


- Among opioid samples tested with medetomidine test strips in March, **86.7%** were positive for medetomidine (**13 of 15 samples**).
- There has been an increase in medetomidine in the unregulated drug supply. In the Northern Health region, medetomidine test strips are now being used at drug checking sites, as medetomidine is typically present in concentrations below the detection limit of the FTIR (<5%).

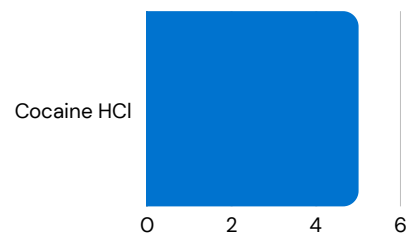
Non-Opioids

Components detected in stimulants

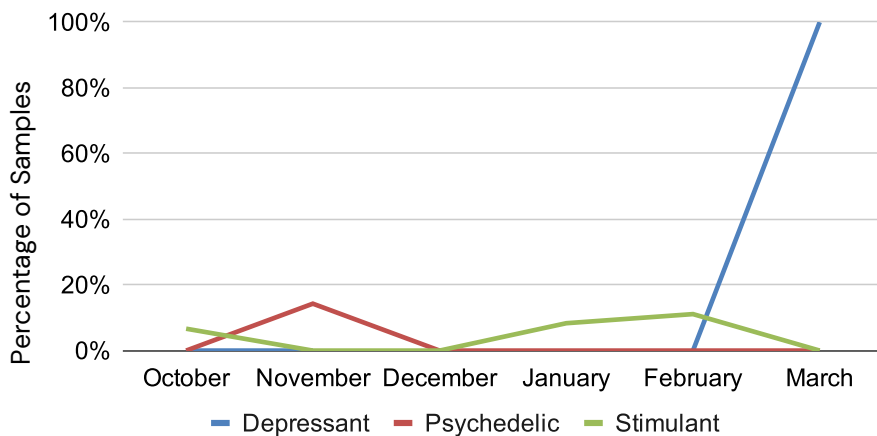
Components in methamphetamine (N=8)



Components in cocaine (N=5)



Fentanyl detected in non-opioids, past 6 months

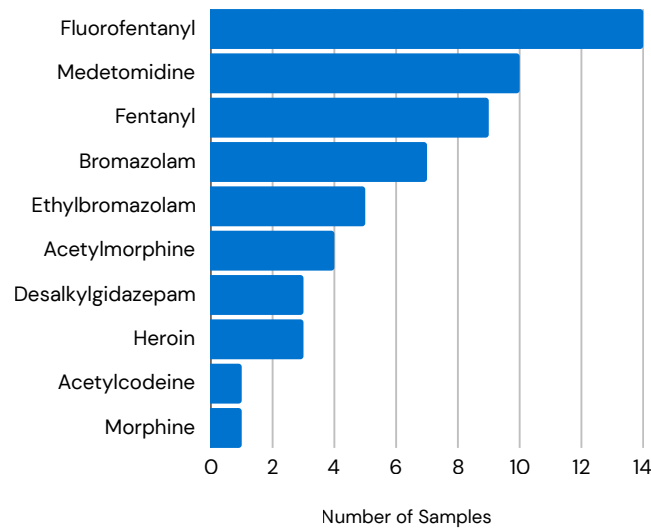


• One depressant sample, an unknown benzodiazepine, was checked in March. This sample and tested positive for fentanyl by FTIR/test strip, benzodiazepines were not detected.

PSMS Secondary Testing Results Summary

A subset of samples were sent for secondary testing provided by Substance at the University of Victoria, using Paper-Spray Mass Spectrometry (PSMS). PSMS is a highly sensitive technology, and can detect components in samples below the detection limit of the FTIR (<5%). Below is a summary of all active components detected in opioid samples sent in confirmatory testing. For more information about Substance please visit their [website](#).

Active components in opioids submitted (N = 21)



Public Health Notifications

Date & Location	Expected Drug	Spectrometry Results	Fentanyl Strip	Benzo Strip	Alert Message
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In March, there were no alerts issued within the Northern Health region pertaining to samples submitted for drug checking.

To subscribe to the provincial drug alert and response system, text the word JOIN to 253787 (ALERTS).

About this data

Data represented in this report is collected from our partner sites across the province using Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectrometry in combination with BTNX fentanyl test strips and benzodiazepine test strips when applicable. We note the FTIR spectrometer has a detection limit of approximately 5% concentration (McCrae, 2019).

Depressant includes: benzodiazepines, etizolam, GHB, hypnotics	Opioid includes: "down", heroin, fentanyl (unregulated opioids), and pharmaceutical opioids	Polysubstance includes: cross-category mixtures	Psychedelic includes: MDMA and related, 2C-family, tryptamines, ketamine, LSD	Stimulant includes: methamphetamine, "speed," cocaine and crack cocaine, cathinones	Unknown includes: samples where the individual was unable to identify an expected substance - this includes found samples.
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We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of [our partners](#) to collect this data.

To find drug checking services in your area please visit our [site locator](#).