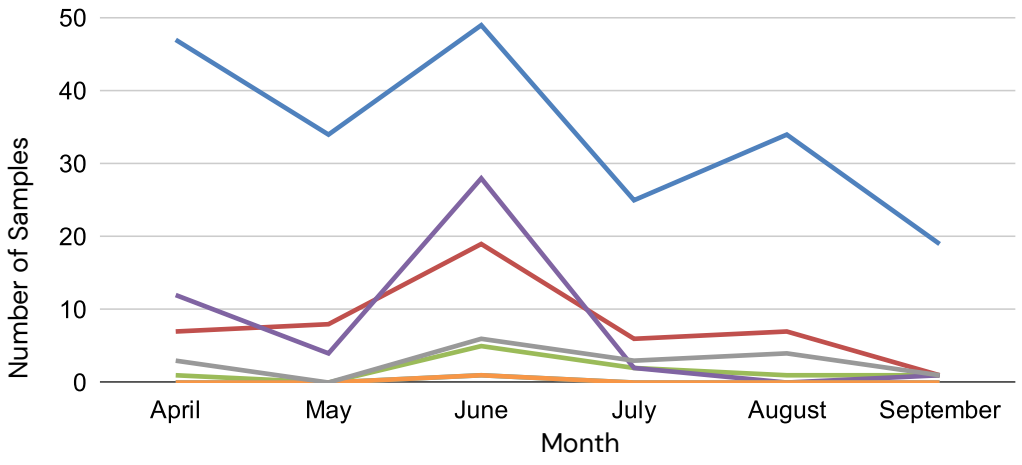
Drug Checking in Northern Health

September 2026

Key findings

- In September, **23** drug checks were performed by community FTIR drug checking sites in the Northern Health region (5 access points).
- The percentage of all opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines increased to **42.1%**. The true percentage may be higher, as some benzodiazepines (e.g., ethylflualprazolam) may be missed by test strip.
- The percentage of unregulated opioids testing positive for medetomidine increased to **78.9%**.
- Among opioids sent for secondary testing in September (**n=13**), medetomidine was detected in **7** 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 samples by drug category in Sept.

Opioid	19
Stimulant	1
Depressant	1
Psychedelic	1
Other	0
Polysubstance	0
Unknown	1
Total:	**23**

Number of drug checks at each site

Location	# of Drugs Checked
POUNDS (Prince George)	14
Terrace ICMT (Smithers)	7
Total	**21**

Less than 5 samples were submitted to each of the following locations, which are included in the total: POUNDS (Quesnel).

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Number of samples with the expected drug detected

Expected Drug	Detected	Not Detected	N/A	Total
Opioid	19	0	0	19
Stimulant	0	1	0	1
Depressant	0	1	0	1
Psychedelic	0	1	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0
Polysubstance	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	1	1
Total	**19**	**3**	**1**	**23**

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
Down	19	0	0	19
Total	**19**	**0**	**0**	**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.

Drug Checking in Northern Health

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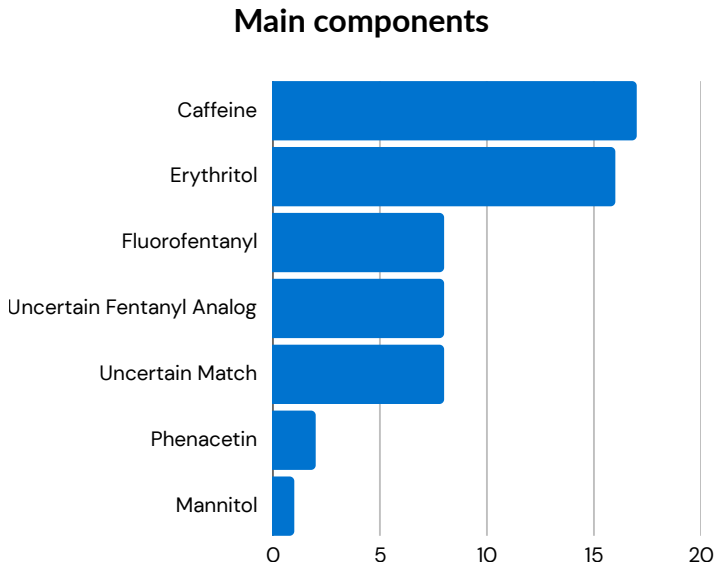
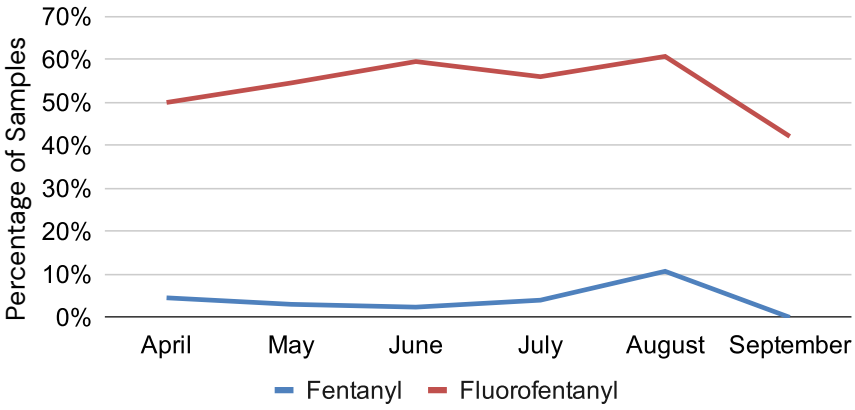
Components detected in unregulated opioids (N=19)



Fentanyl analogs detected in unregulated opioids, past 6 months



- In September, fluorofentanyl remained the most common fentanyl analog detected by FTIR, found in **42.1%** of unregulated opioids (**8** of **19**).
- Conversely, fentanyl was not detected by FTIR. The declining number of fentanyl detections by FTIR may reflect 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 also not detected by FTIR this month. The true number is expected to be higher, as carfentanil is usually contained in concentrations below the FTIR detection limit (<5%). See the **Secondary Testing section** for more information.

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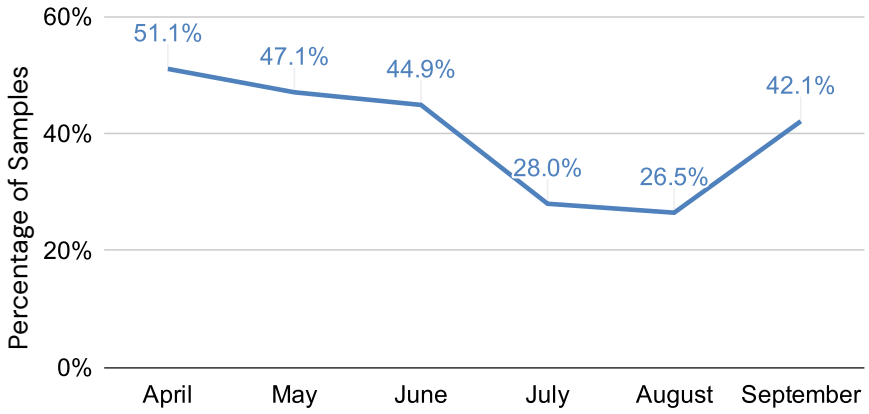
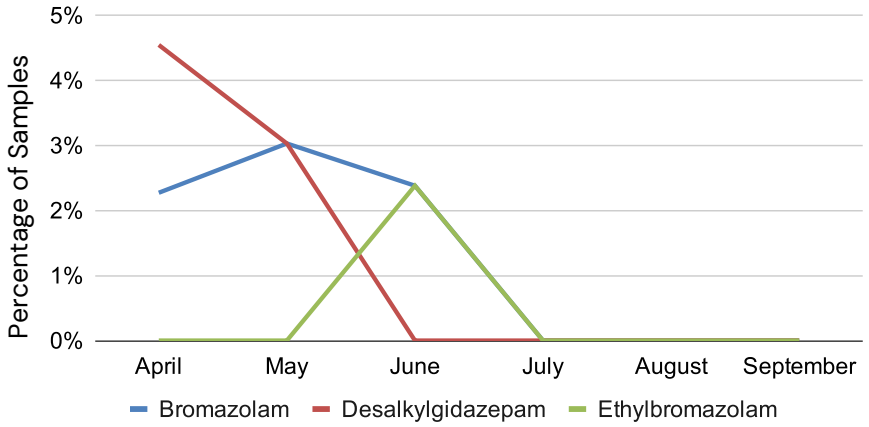
Percentage of opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines, past 6 months



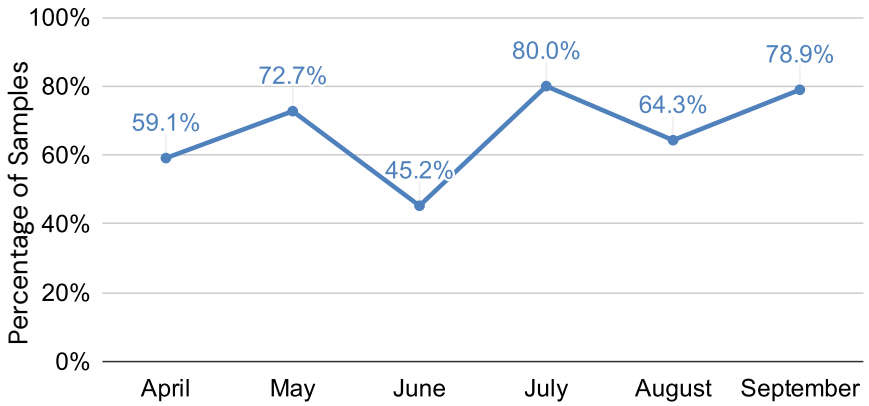
- During the month of September, the percentage of opioid samples testing positive for benzodiazepines increased to **42.1%** (**8** samples of **19** checked).
- Opioid samples are checked for benzodiazepine-positivity using BTNX test strips and the FTIR spectrometer. The true percentage may be higher, as some benzodiazepines (e.g., etizolam, ethylflualprazolam) may be missed by test strip.

Types of benzodiazepines detected by FTIR, past 6 months



- In September, there were no instances of unregulated opioid samples containing benzodiazepines in concentrations high enough to be detectable by FTIR (>5%).
- Among opioids samples sent for secondary testing, ethylbromazolam, ethylflualprazolam, and 3-HO desalkylgidazepam were detected. Please see the **secondary testing** section of this report for more information.

Percentage of opioids testing positive for medetomidine, past 6 months



- In September, the percentage of unregulated opioids testing positive for medetomidine increased to **78.9%** (**15** of **19**).
- A third of samples containing medetomidine were also positive for benzodiazepines (**5** of **15**).
- Unregulated opioids are checked for medetomidine-positivity using BTNX test strips and the FTIR spectrometer. As of March, test strips have been implemented at all drug checking sites in response to the emergence of medetomidine, as it is typically present in concentrations below the FTIR detection limit (<5%).

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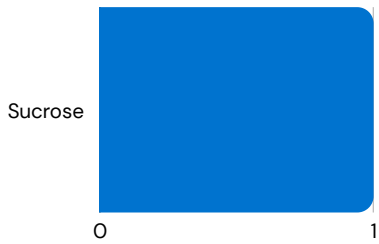
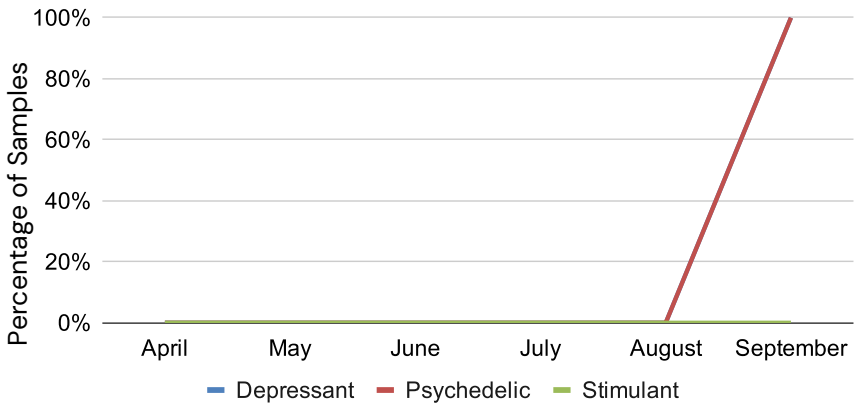
Non-Opioids

Components detected in stimulants

Components in methamphetamine (N=1)



Fentanyl detected in non-opioids, past 6 months



- In September, all depressants (1 medetomidine sample) and all psychedelics (1 ketamine sample) tested positive for fentanyl by FTIR and/or test strip.

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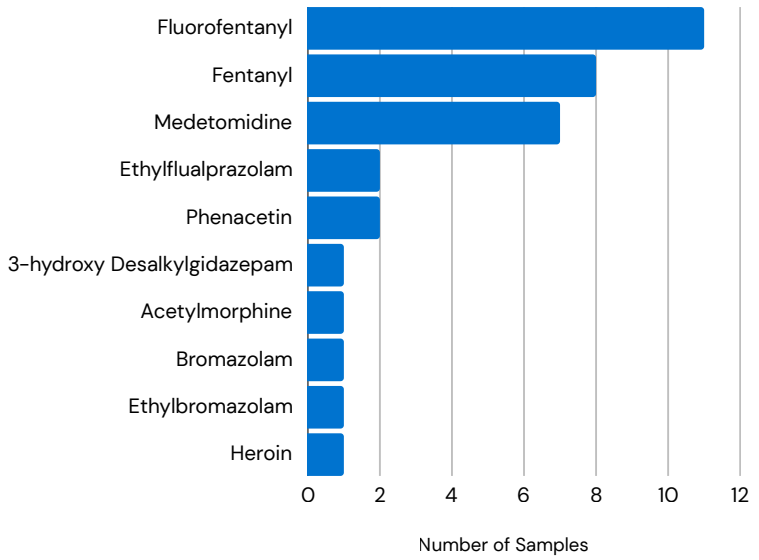
PSMS Secondary Testing Results Summary

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 = 13)



Public Health Notifications

Date & Location	Expected Drug	Alert Message
In September, 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).

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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.*

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.