

Deaths tied to 'fake Xanax' street drug are increasing

January 4 2024, by Ernie Mundell



Three twenty-somethings in Chicago took a street drug they thought was

a harmless form of Xanax. All three were found collapsed and unresponsive eight hours later by one of their mothers, who had them rushed to the hospital. After multiple seizures, fever and heart damage, all three are thought to have recovered, but not before spending many days hospitalized.

According to a new report, the [drug](#) they actually took was an unapproved benzodiazepine sedative called bromazolam, with street names like "fake Xanax" and "dope." It's increasingly being distributed illicitly online or on the street, and when mixed with fentanyl, is also fueling a rising number of deaths.

Law enforcement drug seizures in the United States involving bromazolam have soared from only a handful in 2018 to more than 2,900 by 2023, according to researchers led by Dr. Paul Ehlers, a toxicologist at Cook County Hospital in Chicago.

"In Illinois, bromazolam-involved deaths increased from 10 in 2021 to 51 in 2022," a five-fold increase in just one year, the team noted.

Bromazolam is showing up in other states, too.

"It's a very powerful drug, and when you mix a drug like that and mix it with fentanyl and some of the other opiates, it's just a recipe for disaster," Hamilton County Coroner Jeff Jellison told Indiana's Fox59 News in December.

In a Facebook post, he said signs of dangerous bromazolam use can include "loss of coordination, dizziness, drowsiness, blurred vision, slurred speech, [muscle relaxation](#), difficulty breathing, amnesia and death."

The three cases noted in the Chicago report occurred early in 2023, and

luckily, fentanyl was not involved. All three [young people](#) experienced multiple, recurrent seizures and required tubes while in the ICU to help maintain breathing. All showed evidence of heart damage caused by their experience.

Two of the patients, both males aged 25, recovered and were discharged after four days and 11 days of [hospital](#) care.

The youngest patient, a 20-year-old woman, developed a form of epilepsy and fell into a coma. After 11 days in one hospital she was transferred to another hospital, after which her history is unknown, Ehler's group said.

The report also notes that bromazolam is increasingly showing up in DUI cases, because of its sedating effect on drivers.

Ehler's team are alerting doctors, EMS crews and [health officials](#) to be on the lookout for overdoses involving bromazolam, especially when seizures and fever are present.

More information: Find out more about bromazolam at the [National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators](#).

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