

Reporting on drug alerts issued in Australia for 2025

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Introduction: Drug alerts are publicly issued communications on signals (most commonly substance detections) of public health concern issued by government and community agencies across Australia. The Prompt Response Network (PRN) brings together agencies to enhance public health decision-making and responses to emerging drug-related concerns. Drug alerts are republished on the PRN-managed website theknow.org.au, acting as a national repository of publicly issued alerts.

Methods: Data were sourced from drug alerts republished on theknow.org.au in 2025.

Key Findings: In 2025, 64 'unique' drug alerts were republished to theknow.org.au. Alerts were issued by government health and drug-checking organisations in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory, and South Australia.

The most common alerts related to unexpected detections of nitazenes (16 alerts, 25%), unexpected detections of novel benzodiazepines (NBZ; 11 alerts, 17%), and detections of high-dose MDMA samples (11 alerts, 17%). Six alerts (9%) related to hospital presentations or deaths associated with drugs unexpectedly containing nitazenes or heroin.

Counterfeit pharmaceuticals (products manufactured to appear like registered medicines) were reported in 14 alerts (22%). Nine alerts reported counterfeit alprazolam and five reported counterfeit oxycodone products.

Discussion and Conclusions: Alerts reporting NBZ detections more than doubled compared to 2024. Increased numbers of these alerts align with evidence of increasing NBZ-related overdose deaths in Australia. Nitazene detections remain a prevalent public health concern.

Implications for communities, practice, and policy: Misrepresented samples found to contain nitazenes or heroin highlight the ongoing importance of Take-Home Naloxone and harm reduction programs. Detections of counterfeit pharmaceutical products highlight the need to inform communities in efforts to prevent and reduce inadvertent harm. Supporting the peer leadership of people who use drugs and facilitating inter-agency communication and collaboration is vital to ensure drug alerts are consistent and impactful.

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