**Drug alert**

**White powder containing the potent opioid ‘metonitazene’ has been mis-sold as cocaine in Melbourne.**

**Metonitazene is a novel synthetic opioid**

**Opioids** arecentral nervous system depressants. They typically produce a range of effects including sedation, short-term pain relief, and respiratory depression (where breathing slows or stops). Respiratory depression often appears more quickly with **novel synthetic opioids** (NSOs), increasing the risk of life-threatening overdose. NSOs are a leading contributor to overdose deaths world-wide.

**Metonitazene** is a potent NSO that is not often seen in Australia. Its potency is **similar to fentanyl**, estimated to be between **30 and 200 times** that of morphine. This means it can produce **life-threatening toxic effects** in very small amounts. Metonitazene usually appears as a white, off-white or beige powder.

The Department of Health is aware of **two serious recent hospitalisations** associated with metonitazene. Patients experienced strong and fast-acting effects, leading to loss of consciousness, respiratory depression and hypoxia (insufficient oxygen for normal functioning).

**Know the signs of opioid overdose – and carry naloxone**

**People who are expecting to use cocaine** may not know how to recognise and respond to opioid overdose. **Signs of opioid overdose** to look out for include: breathing slowly, reduced consciousness (meaning someone is hard to rouse), or tiny pupils in some cases. More information about opioid overdose symptoms can be found [here](https://www.penington.org.au/between-us/between-us-overdose-and-naloxone/).

**Naloxone is an easy-to-use medication that can reverse opioid overdose** – it’s safe to use even if you’re not sure whether someone has taken opioids. **Naloxone is available for free** from [participating pharmacies](https://www.ppaonline.com.au/take-home-naloxone/where-to-access-take-home-naloxone) (a script is not required). The pharmacist will show you how to use naloxone. Alternatively, contact [Harm Reduction Victoria](https://www.hrvic.org.au/training) for training from peers.

**Using metonitazene or other opioids with depressants** such as alcohol, GHB or benzodiazepines (‘Xanax’, ‘Valium’, ‘Mylan’, etc) **increases the risk of overdose**.

**Reduce the risk of harm**

If you experience adverse drug effects, or are present when someone has an unexpected reaction, **seek help immediately by calling Triple Zero (000)**.

All alcohol and other drug use comes with risks, so:

* **Be aware** that other false or contaminated drug products may circulate in Victoria, even if no specific warning has been issued about them. Metonitazene may circulate in other forms.
* Make sure you’re in a **safe environment with people you trust**.
* **Remember**, even ‘pure’ drugs can produce serious side effects and death, and can interact dangerously with medications/pharmaceutical drugs.

Contact **Harm Reduction Victoria’s DanceWize team** for anonymous support and education from peers. Talk to DanceWize volunteers by email at [info@dancewize.org.au](mailto:info@dancewize.org.au).

If you or someone you know needs help with alcohol or drug use, call DirectLine on 1800 888 236 or visit [directline.org.au](https://www.directline.org.au/) for information and support to access treatment.