

# Etizolam: Public Notice

June 2019

## What is etizolam?

There have been recent media reports in British Columbia of street opioids being produced with a drug called etizolam. Etizolam has been detected in a number of cases in Alberta. Etizolam is similar to benzodiazepines like Valium, Xanax, and Ativan.

## What are benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines (aka “benzos”) are central nervous system (CNS) depressant drugs used to treat people with anxiety disorders, panic attacks, sleep disorders, or seizure disorders. Common side effects of benzodiazepines include:

- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Drowsiness or sleepiness
- Trouble remembering things
- Slurred speech
- Muscle weakness
- Trouble with balance or coordination

Mixing benzodiazepines with other CNS depressant drugs such as alcohol or opioids can increase the risk of poisoning/overdose and complicate management and reversal of symptoms.

## Responding to etizolam poisoning/overdose

Etizolam poisoning/overdose can look similar to an opioid poisoning/overdose. The person may look sleepy or drowsy, have slurred speech, poor coordination, memory loss and slowed breathing. **Etizolam is not an opioid and naloxone will not reverse the effects or symptoms of poisoning/overdose.**

Etizolam is often mixed with other drugs; it may be hard to tell if a person is experiencing poisoning/overdose due to an opioid or etizolam, if the drug they have taken contains both opioids and etizolam or any other benzodiazepine. Naloxone will not worsen etizolam poisoning or overdose and should be given as it can reverse the effects of the opioid; however, it will not reverse the effects of etizolam or other benzodiazepines and the person’s symptoms may not appear to improve. For this reason, it is always best to call 911 immediately when a poisoning/overdose is suspected or identified and follow the operator’s direction as to how to respond safely.

## Safer drug use strategies

Some ways to prevent and minimize the risk of poisoning or overdose when taking drugs casually include:

- **Avoid using alone** – use at a Supervised Consumption Service site or with others and have a safety plan in case there is an overdose.
- **Start low and go slow** – always do a test dose to check the potency or strength of the drug.
- **Avoid mixing substances** – use one drug at a time to ensure tolerance before adding others to the mix, and be aware of how drugs (e.g., prescription medications, street drugs, cannabis, alcohol, etc.) might interact and produce negative effects.
- **Know your tolerance** – tolerance can decrease within a very short period of time of abstinence (e.g., hospitalization, completion of detox or treatment, incarceration) and can increase sensitivity to drugs and risk of poisoning.
- **Know the signs and symptoms of poisoning/overdose and call 911 always for direction and support.**
- **Carry a Naloxone Kit and know to use it to respond to suspected opioid overdose.**

## Additional Information

- AHS DrugSafe – [www.drugsafe.ca](http://www.drugsafe.ca)
- Alberta Community Council on HIV (ACCH) – [www.acch.ca](http://www.acch.ca)
- Government of Canada: Benzodiazepines – [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/problematic-prescription-drug-use/benzodiazepines.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/problematic-prescription-drug-use/benzodiazepines.html)