



Short Report

## Fentanyl is used in Mexico's northern border: current challenges for drug health policies

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### Abstract

#### Background and Aims

Results from a recent study among 750 heroin users in three Mexico's northern border cities revealed an increase in white powder availability (also known as China white) and preference for this product among heroin users, as well as a general perception of increased overdose cases among this population. Here, we questioned whether those findings reflect an increased presence of heroin laced with fentanyl, which is associated with greater risks of overdose but that, until now, has not been described in Mexico.

#### Design

We tested fentanyl using highly sensitive test strips in syringe plungers, metal cookers and drug wrappings associated with heroin use.

#### Setting

Three injection sites in Tijuana, Baja California, México.

#### Participants

Eighty-nine heroin users who interchanged paraphernalia for new syringes.

#### Measurements

We tested 59 residues of 'pure' white powder. The rest were white powder with black tar ( $n = 5$ ) or white powder with crystal meth ( $n = 9$ ), black tar with crystal meth ( $n = 1$ ), black tar only ( $n = 13$ ) and crystal meth only ( $n = 2$ ).

#### Findings

Users believed that they consumed either white powder heroin, white powder heroin with crystal meth, white powder with black tar heroin or black tar heroin only. Analyses revealed that 93% ( $n = 55$ ) of the 'pure' white powder samples had fentanyl. All ( $n = 9$ ) the white powder samples mixed with crystal meth and 40% ( $n = 2$ ) of the white powder with black tar were also laced with fentanyl.

#### Conclusions

In a sample of 89 heroin users in Mexico, most white powder heroin users were unknowingly exposed to fentanyl, with fentanyl detected in 93% of white powder samples.




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Information

#### Metrics

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#### Details

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