

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 10, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write to express urgent concern regarding the growing use and dangers of emerging synthetic opioids, particularly the class of drugs known as nitazenes, and to strongly urge the Department of Health and Human Services to prioritize a comprehensive federal response to this escalating threat.

Nitazenes, originally developed as experimental pain relievers in the 1950s, are now being illicitly manufactured abroad and trafficked across the United States. These synthetic opioids are reported to be significantly more potent than fentanyl—some by a factor of 10 or more—and are increasingly appearing in toxicology reports, often unbeknownst to the user. Unlike more well-known substances, nitazenes are often not detected in standard toxicology screens, contributing to underreporting and delayed responses.

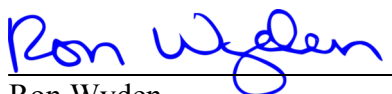
In 2025 alone, multiple states, including Pennsylvania, Texas, and Colorado, have reported rising numbers of fatal overdoses linked to nitazenes. Abroad, the threat has already intensified: in England and Wales, 179 deaths were attributed to nitazene-related overdoses between June 2023 and May 2024. Public health officials in Europe warn that these substances are spreading rapidly, again, often undetected by standard toxicology screens—a trend that mirrors early stages of the fentanyl crisis in the United States.

Without swift intervention, nitazenes will drive a new wave of addiction and overdose deaths. There is an urgent need for a coordinated federal response that prioritizes prevention, early detection, treatment, and expanded access to harm reduction tools like naloxone, especially as law enforcement agencies like the DEA have classified nitazenes as an emerging threat. Additionally, investment in research to develop new overdose reversal agents effective against this increasingly potent class of synthetic opioids is crucial to reduce risk of overdose deaths.

We urge the Department of Health and Human Services to formulate a strategy to address the rising threat of nitazenes before it escalates into a full-scale public health crisis. This plan should include coordination across agencies, investment in research, and expanded access to prevention and treatment resources. We welcome the opportunity to work together in identifying and crafting policy and regulatory proposals to protect our communities from this emerging class of synthetic opioids. We request the following information on HHS's efforts to monitor, mitigate, and respond to this emerging threat:

1. What steps is HHS taking to improve detection and reporting of nitazene-related overdoses and deaths across states?
2. Does CDC plan to expand routine toxicology screening protocols to include nitazenes in state and local medical examiner systems?
3. How is HHS coordinating with DEA and state health departments to ensure timely identification of new nitazene analogs?
4. What resources or technical assistance is HHS providing to laboratories to increase their capacity to detect nitazenes?
5. Has HHS issued, or does it plan to issue, national guidance or alerts to clinicians, first responders, and harm-reduction organizations about nitazene risks and detection challenges?
6. What efforts are underway to ensure that harm-reduction organizations and people who use drugs receive timely information about nitazene-contaminated supplies?
7. Are there plans to integrate nitazene awareness into existing opioid-response campaigns or naloxone distribution programs?
8. What evidence does HHS have regarding naloxone's effectiveness against nitazene-involved overdoses at current recommended doses?
9. If higher or repeated doses of naloxone are required, is HHS providing updated training or guidance to local health departments and first responders?
10. How is HHS ensuring that medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) programs are equipped to address patients exposed to ultra-potent synthetic opioids?

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



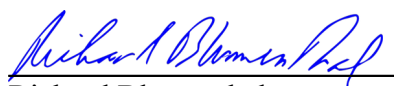
Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Richard Blumenthal", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator