



Issue date
16 May 2024

Distributed to:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Director, Regulation and Compliance Unit

Action required by:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance

We recommend you also inform:

Directors, Managers and Staff of:

- Drug and Alcohol services
- Mental Health services
- Emergency Departments
- Toxicology Units
- Pharmacy
- Ambulance

Expert Reference Group

Content reviewed by:

- Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs, NSW Ministry of Health
- Standing Panel on Toxicity Risk
- Chief Pharmacist

Clinical Excellence Commission

Tel: 02 9269 5500

[Email](#)
[Internet](#)
[Intranet](#)

Review date
May 2025

Counterfeit diazepam found in NSW

Background

This Safety Information is to inform clinicians of detections of counterfeit **diazepam** products in NSW. This is accompanied by a public drug warning (available [here](#)). NSW Health has previously issued [Safety Information SI: 011/23](#) about counterfeit alprazolam in NSW.



Figure 1. Image of counterfeit diazepam product – outer packaging and tablets. 'Antenex' is an Australian registered brand of diazepam and it may be difficult to differentiate between legitimate and counterfeit products. Images reproduced with permission from NSW Police.



Figure 2. Image of counterfeit diazepam tablets. The presentation of these tablets is similar to an overseas registered brand of diazepam. Images reproduced with permission from NSW Police.

Assessment

- There have been several recent detections of counterfeit diazepam in NSW from samples seized by NSW Police and analysed by NSW Health Pathology Forensic & Analytical Science Service.
- There is no indication of quality issues in relation to the registered products.
- One of the counterfeit diazepam products had tablet markings and packaging resembling the locally available 'Antenex' brand of diazepam. They were found in bottles labelled 'Antenex 5' containing off-white tablets marked 'DM | 5' with 'G' on the reverse (see **Figure 1**). One batch was found to contain only bromazolam, a novel benzodiazepine, and another batch contained only paracetamol and caffeine.
- Other counterfeit tablets resemble a brand available overseas, appearing as a yellow tablet marked "DAN | 5619" on one side and '5' on the reverse (see **Figure 2**). They contained only bromazolam.
- Prior detections of diazepam 10 mg tablets (a strength not marketed in Australia) have also been found to be counterfeit.
- Bromazolam is a novel benzodiazepine that continues to be associated with serious harm and death in NSW and overseas. Bromazolam is currently the most common novel benzodiazepine detected in Australia and is commonly detected in counterfeit alprazolam products.
- Internationally, analysis of counterfeit diazepam has identified the presence of potent opioids.
- Withdrawal syndromes can be a concern with use of counterfeit products as some have no benzodiazepines present.



Clinical Recommendations

1. Be aware that if a patient is taking illicitly obtained diazepam, the product may be counterfeit and contain novel benzodiazepines such as bromazolam or other drugs. They may have variable strength compared to registered products. Counterfeits may be difficult to distinguish from legitimate products. Maintain a high index of suspicion for brands or formulations not available or marketed locally, for example diazepam 10 mg tablets.
2. Take caution when interpreting urine drug screen (UDS) results if a novel benzodiazepine is suspected. Some novel benzodiazepines are detected by UDS but may not be able to be identified on confirmatory testing. Misinterpretation as a false positive has been reported.¹ Additionally, some novel benzodiazepines may not be detected on initial UDS. Consult your local pathology service if results appear inconsistent with suspected illicit benzodiazepine use and/or confirmatory testing is required.
3. If the patient has significant clinical signs such as central nervous system and respiratory depression, seizures, and/or ECG changes, provide standard emergency care and consult your local toxicologist or the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26, who can advise on further management and arrange specific testing as indicated.
4. Report suspected counterfeit diazepam cases to the Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs, NSW Ministry of Health by email MOH-PRISE@health.nsw.gov.au.

References

1. Puzyrenko A, Wang D, Schneider R, Wallace G, Schreiber S, Brandt K, Gunsolus IL, Urine drug screening in the era of designer benzodiazepines: Comparison of three immunoassay platforms, LC-QTOF-MS and LC-MS/MS. J Anal Toxicol. 2021; bkab108, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jat/bkab108>

Required actions for the Local Health Districts/Networks

1. Instruct clinicians to be alert for circulation of counterfeit diazepam, as well as alprazolam, and be vigilant during patient histories which report non-medical use of benzodiazepines. Clinicians should consider referral to toxicology or the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 if the patient has significant clinical signs or to pathology for assistance in interpreting urine drug screen results.