

NDEWS Report: Insights into pentobarbital

NDEWS received a media request asking for insight regarding pentobarbital trends in response to a recent Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) [news release](#). According to the news release, the DEA recently seized five kilograms of pentobarbital along with other drugs (methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin) when agents busted a cartel-linked drug operation in Texas.

Pentobarbital is a short-acting barbiturate. In the past, it has been used as a sedative, to control convulsions, and for short-term treatment of insomnia. It has also been used in some US states for lethal injection and is currently in demand in the US to facilitate assisted suicide.

NDEWS Sentinel Site Report, April 2024:

In April 2024, NDEWS asked our Sentinel Site Directors about what they have heard about **pentobarbital** in their area. Their responses are noted in brief below.

Seattle: Jason Williams, PhD, & Caleb Banta-Green, PhD, MPH, MSW

Not yet seen in crime lab data since late 2022. It is not possible to readily determine the presence of pentobarbital in poisoning/overdose deaths due to coding procedure.

New York City: Alex Harocopos, PhD, MSc, & Ellenie Tuazon, MPH

No cases or scenarios mentioned related to pentobarbital.

Kentucky: Dana Quesinberry, JD, DrPH

No current information.

Denver: Devika Bhatia, MD

No new information or insight.

Atlanta: Matthew Myers, MS, MPA

Almost never comes across barbiturates anymore.

San Francisco: Phillip Coffin, MD, MIA

No new information or insight.

Texas: Dayong Lee, PhD

Various barbiturates (e.g., butalbital, phenobarbital, and pentobarbital) in clandestine tablets represented as Xanax or oxys or pressed M30 tablets, with confirmed co-mixtures of fentanyl, acetaminophen, pentobarbital, and xylazine. Occasionally sees cases for butalbital and phenobarbital in impaired drivers (n=14 in 2019-2023).

Florida: Bruce Goldberger, PhD

No unexpected reports of pentobarbital in decedents.

National Survivors Union: Caty Simon

The Texas Drug User Health Alliance says that people often buy pentobarbital on the Dark Web and online.

NDEWS Report: Insights into pentobarbital

Insights from our other collaborators:

A statement from Tom Carr, former Executive Director of the Washington/Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (W/B HIDTA): There have only been 18 pentobarbital seizures since 2010. There was one in 2023 for 60 dosing units (DUs) and one in 2024 so far for 259 DUs.

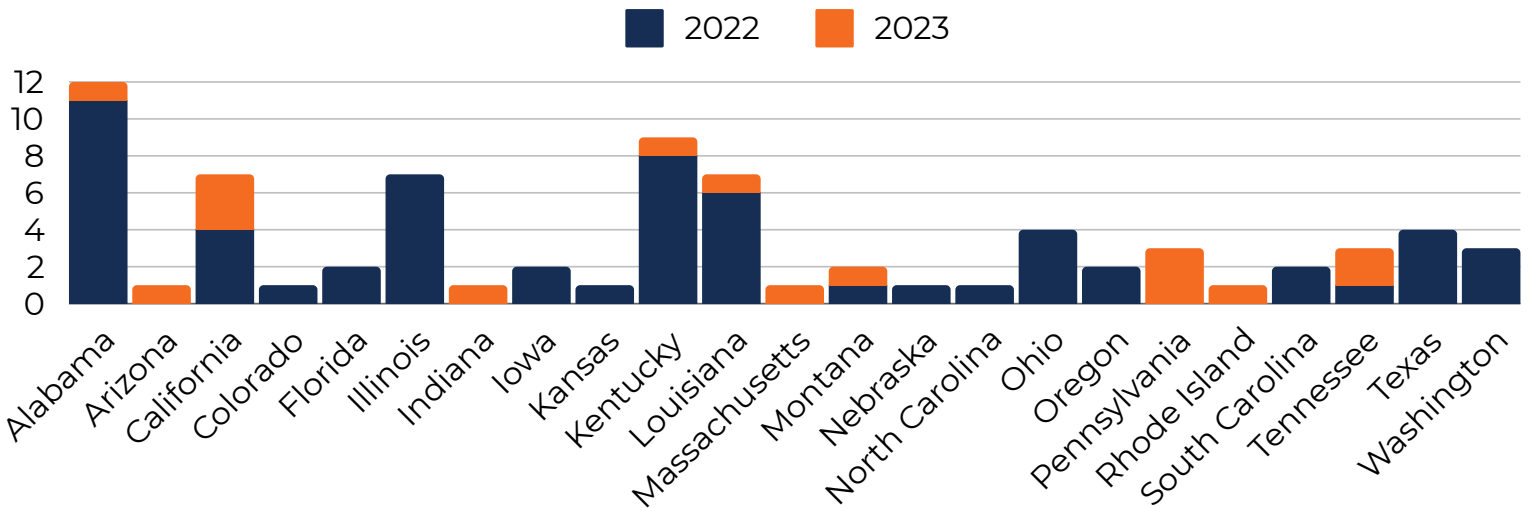
The Center for Forensic Science Research & Education (CFSRE) has encountered abnormal pills adulterated with pentobarbital once, but no other cases have been observed.

In February 2024, CFSRE investigated counterfeit tablets seized at the US Southwest Border. The case involved six exhibits with a total of 40 tablets. The pills in two exhibits (containing pentobarbital) also contained fentanyl, metamizole, acetaminophen, xylazine, and para-fluorophenethyl 4-ANPP, despropionyl para-fluorofentanyl and/or 4-ANPP. Adulterants such as acetaminophen, lidocaine, levamisole (a banned anti-worming agent), and chemical byproducts from illicit fentanyl manufacture were also present. [Read the full report here.](#)

National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) pentobarbital data:

NFLIS-Drug is a DEA program that systematically collects drug identification data from drug submissions to laboratories across the United States. Unweighted data concerning pentobarbital are presented below.

Pentobarbital detections from 2022-2023 by US state



Pentobarbital detections in the US from 2010-2023

