



# Medetomidine Drug Supply Alert

## First Responders



### Medetomidine (MEH-deh-TOH-mih-deen)

Medetomidine is a sedative that is being mixed with fentanyl. It was first found in the Philadelphia area in April 2024. Since summer 2024, it has also been found in Massachusetts. By June 2025, medetomidine showed up in drug samples from every county in the state. Central and Western Massachusetts have the highest levels of it in tested drugs.

### What to Know

**Withdrawal:** People who often use drugs with medetomidine in them can become dependent on it. If they stop using, they might go through withdrawal. Withdrawal from medetomidine can be a medical emergency and can start very quickly. It may cause a fast heartbeat, high blood pressure, headache, seizures or shaking, feeling very anxious or upset, or seeing things that aren't there. Some people may need to go to the hospital to feel better.

- Call for medical support if you observe these behaviors. Inform medical personnel at hand-off so they can test for medetomidine and provide treatment.

**Overdose and Sedation:** Medetomidine is not an opioid, but it's often found with fentanyl, so give naloxone (Narcan) when responding to overdose.

- Give rescue breaths and make sure the person's chest rises and falls. Wait at least 3 minutes before giving another dose of naloxone. Summon medical support.
- Because medetomidine is a strong sedative, it can make overdose harder to reverse. The person might only start breathing a little and stay barely awake, so it's important to keep watch until supports arrive.

### Effects

- Medetomidine can cause heavy sleepiness, dry mouth, slow breathing, low heart rate and blood pressure, muscle twitches, and even hallucinations.
- Medetomidine is considered to be stronger and to last longer than xylazine, which is another sedating substance seen in fentanyl.
- People who used fentanyl with medetomidine said they were: "knocked out instantly; barely able to move, slow breathing, dry mouth, overdose." Others said: "extreme irritability/agitation, hearing things that weren't there."

Like with xylazine and with fentanyl, touching drugs with medetomidine in them or touching people who use medetomidine will not result in any of these sedating effects. Adhere to department protocols and universal safety precautions (wear gloves, wash with soap & water) when handling substances.

### Community Safety Resources

**Harm Reduction Organizations:** Refer people to local harm reduction programs that offer drug checking services. Test strips and other devices that detect medetomidine are available there. See [info.streetcheck.org/madds](http://info.streetcheck.org/madds) for locations. For a listing of all programs visit [[mass.gov/info-details/harm-reduction-program-locator](http://mass.gov/info-details/harm-reduction-program-locator)].

**SafeSpot Hotline:** Refer people to SafeSpot, a peer-run anonymous hotline for when people are using alone. SafeSpot connects to 911 if problems arise. Call (800) 972-0590 or visit [safe-spot.me](http://safe-spot.me)

**Encourage Carrying Naloxone:** Free naloxone is available at YouCan [[youcan.info](http://youcan.info)]. Visit [www.mass.gov/naloxone](http://www.mass.gov/naloxone)

Prepare and stay safe. Check local drug supply trends at [www.streetcheck.org](http://www.streetcheck.org).