

testRI releases preliminary results of drug surveillance study



PROVIDENCE, RI – testRI (Toxicological and Ethnographic Drug Surveillance Testing in Rhode Island) is today releasing preliminary results from its two year study to find out what is in the local drug supply in Rhode Island. The 90 samples analyzed provide key insights into the local drug supply in Rhode Island and how this may affect the ongoing overdose crisis.

One of the study's main goals is to see how drug supply changes impact people who use drugs in our community. This study tests used equipment, like pipes and syringes. Equipment is collected from the community and donations from individuals or local organizations. Samples were processed using advanced confirmatory toxicology testing (LC-QTOF-MS) at Rhode Island Hospital.

Of the 90 samples tested to date:

- 52% were from Providence (47 samples)
- 14% were from Pawtucket (13 samples)
- 9% were from West Warwick (8 samples)
- The remaining 25% were from: Warwick, Coventry, Rumford, East Providence, Central Falls, North Kingstown, Cumberland, Woonsocket and East Greenwich

Out of the 90 samples tested:

- 47% of the samples were sold as fentanyl (42 samples)
- 31% of the samples were sold as stimulants (cocaine, meth) (28 samples)
- 8% of the samples were sold as pressed pills (Percocets, Xanax) (7 samples)

Upon testing:

- 44% of all samples tested contained xylazine
- Among the stimulant samples (28), 39% (11 samples) contained opioids like fentanyl and fentanyl analogs and tramadol. In addition to fentanyl, 11% (3 samples) also contained xylazine
- Amongst the pressed pill samples (7), 86% (6 samples) contained fentanyl and xylazine. 1 sample contained a designer benzodiazepine.

Implications for the overdose crisis in the state of Rhode Island:

The preliminary results of our study illustrate the unpredictability of the drug supply. A changing drug supply means that people may not know what is in their drugs before using them – this can increase the risk of overdose.

Xylazine is of particular concern as an active cut and showed up in more than half of the samples tested to date. Xylazine is a veterinary tranquilizer and can cause increased sedation complicating overdose events. Naloxone has not been documented to reverse xylazine adverse effects. Xylazine exposure is associated with development of wounds and withdrawal symptoms.

Fentanyl continues to be a concern in the local drug supply in Rhode Island. While it is a drug that is purchased for use by some, it is also showing up in stimulants in some of the samples we tested. Therefore, it is important that those who use stimulants like crystal meth and cocaine follow harm reduction practices to mitigate the risk of overdose. These include: not using alone, having naloxone, going slow, and testing your drugs with fentanyl test strips. Those buying prescription pills from sources other than a pharmacy should be mindful that these may contain fentanyl and fentanyl analogs as well.

testRI is a joint initiative of the People, Place and Health Collective at the Brown University School of Public Health and the Department of Emergency Medicine at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University. It is funded by the Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE). Principal investigators are Dr. Alexandra Collins, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology at Brown University, and Dr. Rachel Wightman, Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

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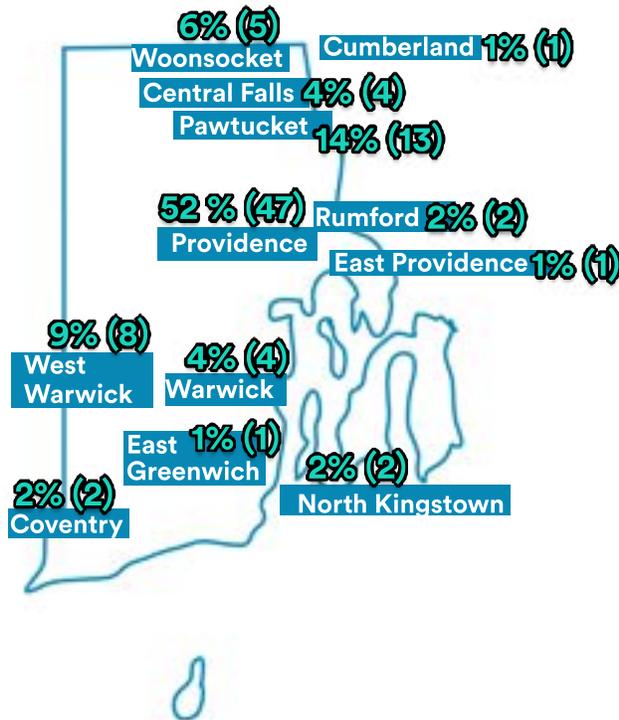
Summary of Results (90 samples)

testRI is a two-year study to find out what is in the drug supply in Rhode Island and how changes to the supply are impacting people who use drugs in our community. We are testing used equipment, like pipes and syringes, that are collected from the community or donated by individuals or local organizations. Samples are tested using advanced confirmatory toxicology testing (LC-QTOF-MS).

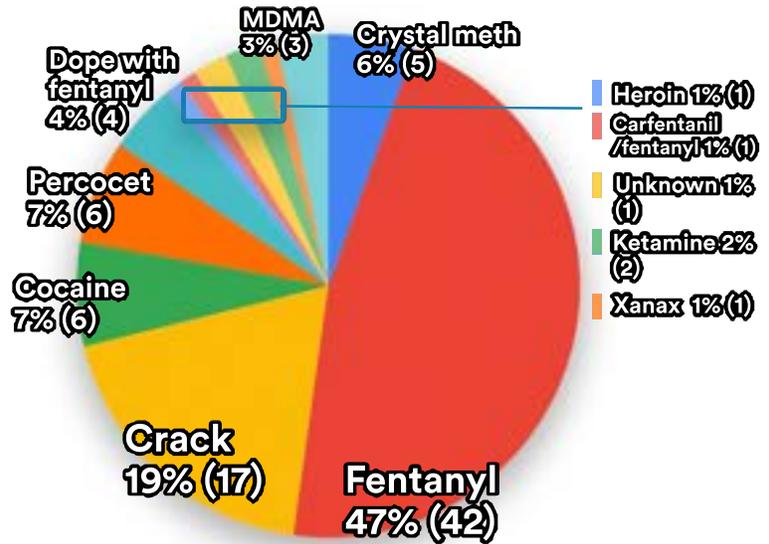
Data from all samples tested in the study can be found on testri.org.

*Samples we have collected and tested only represent a small part of the local drug supply in Rhode Island and may not represent the broader drug supply in the state. Samples are also not being tested in relation to overdose so outcomes from use, like overdose, are unknown.

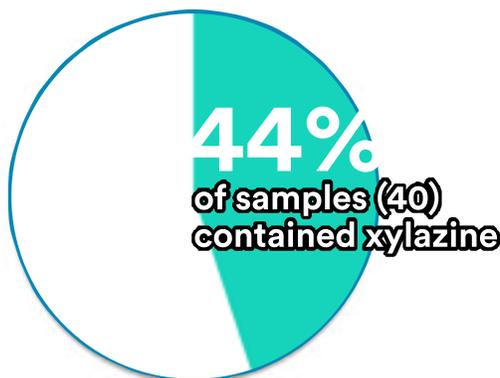
where all samples were collected (90):



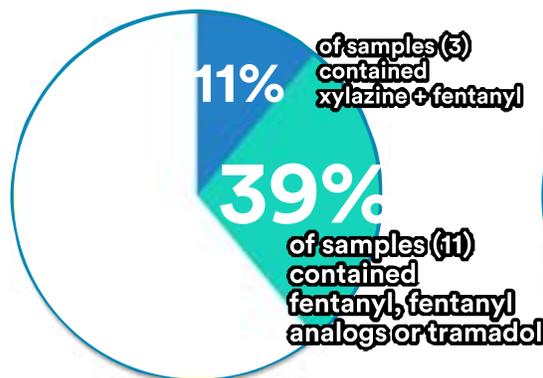
what samples were tested (90):



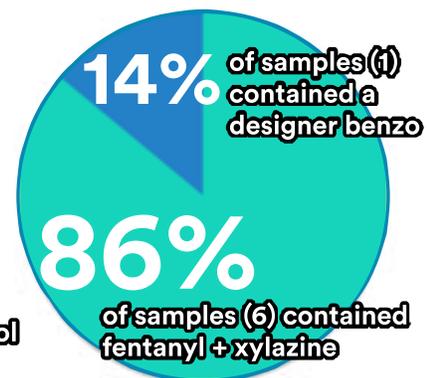
among all samples (90):



among stimulant samples (meth, cocaine) (28):



among pill samples (Percocets, Xanax) (7):



Numbers in parentheses denote the sample amounts.