

European Drug Alert System risk communication

Increase in the availability of fentanyl and related harms – Bulgaria, 2024-ongoing

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This update provides additional information on continued fentanyl availability and related harms in Bulgaria, as reported in the EDAS risk communication EDAS-RC-2025-0002 issued on 8 December 2025. Recent developments include the dismantling of an illicit fentanyl production site in Sofia, an increase in 2026 in the quantity of fentanyl seized and preliminary syringe residue monitoring results indicating fentanyl exposure among people who inject drugs. The update also considers potential cross-border implications in light of fentanyl detections in syringes collected in northern Greece.

Situation

Supply – seizures and dismantlement of a production and distribution site

Available information on seizures suggest that fentanyl availability has recently increased in Bulgaria. The quantity of material containing fentanyl seized in the first eight months of 2026 was almost triple the total quantity reported for 2025 (Figure 1).

Quantity of material containing fentanyl seized in Bulgaria (kg)



Figure 1. Total quantity of material containing fentanyl reported to the Bulgarian national focal point by year and type of detection (preliminary identification and analytically confirmed). Weight is not corrected for purity. Sources: Bulgarian Ministry of Interior; Forensic Laboratory at Military Medical Academy, Sofia; National Institute of Forensic Sciences; Regional Forensic Laboratories at the Ministry of Interior.

In part, this increase can be attributed to the seizure of fentanyl material at a production site dismantled in Sofia in August 2026. The remaining seizures mainly involved brown powders adulterated with caffeine, paracetamol and/or erythritol, and occurred primarily at street level. Seizures involved relatively small quantities, although larger seizures have also been reported. Where purity data were available, fentanyl concentrations ranged from 1.6% to 10.5%.

The discovery of a fentanyl production and distribution facility in Bulgaria demonstrates that fentanyl production capacity exists within the country. The site dismantled was estimated to have a production capacity of around 0.5 kg of fentanyl per day (Figure 2). Approximately 6 kg of "already diluted fentanyl powder" (i.e. fentanyl mixed with cutting agents or excipients) and around 0.5 kg of material described as "pure fentanyl" were seized at the site, alongside amphetamine and methamphetamine. Information released by Bulgarian authorities suggests that the site may have formed part of a broader organised criminal network operating between Sofia and Ruse, and that production may have been intended for the domestic market. Investigations remain ongoing, and key details, including analytical confirmation of the seized materials, the source of precursors and when production began are not available at present. There is no association between this production site and the fentanyl positive drug induced deaths in the country in 2024 and 2025.



Figure 2. Pictures of the dismantled production and distribution site. Source for images: Pyce Ruse District Prosecutor's Office in Bulgaria.

Harms – drug induced deaths

The increase in seizures coincides with more frequent detection of fentanyl in drug-induced deaths in Bulgaria. Fentanyl exposure was confirmed in 58 of 125 drug-induced deaths (46%) in 2025, compared with 53 of 127 (42%) in 2024 and 5 of 47 (11%) in 2023. Preliminary information available up to August 2026 indicates that fentanyl was detected in 25 of 90 drug-induced deaths (28%). Although this increase may partly reflect improved coverage of toxicological analysis, surveillance and enhanced laboratory capacity at national level, the trend remains concerning. Available data do not establish the role of fentanyl in these deaths or its source (prescribed medicines, diverted medicinal products or illicitly produced).

Use – detections in syringe residues

Preliminary results from Bulgaria's first participation in the ESCAPE syringe residue monitoring project, in July 2026, provide further indications of increased fentanyl availability on the illicit drug market. Samples were collected at three locations in Sofia and two locations in Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second-largest city located in the south-central part of the country. Fentanyl was detected in 17% (26/151) of syringes collected in Sofia and 94% (143/152) in Plovdiv. The high proportion of fentanyl-positive

syringes, particularly in Plovdiv, suggests that fentanyl is circulating among people who inject drugs in these areas. Acetylfentanyl was detected alongside fentanyl in 32 syringes in Plovdiv and 2 in Sofia. As acetylfentanyl may occur as an impurity or by-product of illicit fentanyl manufacture, this finding could indicate that at least some of the fentanyl detected originated from illicit production. Paracetamol, caffeine, methamphetamine and methadone were also frequently detected alongside fentanyl.

Anecdotal reports from harm reduction services suggest that some users are aware they are using fentanyl, with both injecting and inhaling being reported.

Signals indicating potential for cross border spread: Greece – detections in syringe residues

Syringe residue analyses (ESCAPE project) from Greece may also indicate increasing fentanyl use in some parts of the country. In Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city, near the Bulgarian border in the north of the country, fentanyl was detected in 14% (43/298) of used syringes collected in September 2025, compared with 2% (5/241) in 2024. Acetylfentanyl (5) and norfentanyl (5) were also identified in a small number of samples. Further monitoring is needed to determine whether this represents a sustained trend and to better understand potential links with developments observed in neighbouring Bulgaria.

Potential implications

The illicit production of synthetic opioids in Europe remains rare. In this context, the detection of a fentanyl production site in Bulgaria in 2026 is a significant development. Following the dismantling of an illicit production site, sudden changes in the illicit drug market may occur and have unintended consequences for public health. Such disruption can destabilise local drug markets and temporarily increase overdose risk, particularly in contexts of reduced access to opioid agonist treatment (OAT). People who use opioids may be particularly vulnerable during periods of market instability, as reduced availability prompts some individuals to seek alternative suppliers or replacements, thereby increasing exposure to unfamiliar products of unknown potency and composition. Changes in the opioid market need to be monitored closely, particularly those related to drug availability, composition, potency, patterns of use, drug-related harms, and increased competition and violence among criminal groups. Options for national public health responses should be assessed, including measures to improve access to OAT and strengthen the provision of harm reduction services, such as reducing barriers to the initiation and continuation of OAT during periods of increased fentanyl-related harms and monitoring treatment uptake and retention.

Options for response

The following response options might be considered:

Strengthen overdose prevention and harm reduction interventions in close cooperation with health authorities, tailored to national needs and legal context. These may include:

- Access to OAT for people with opioid dependence, including provisional arrangements to lower barriers to initiate and to continue OAT during an increase in fentanyl-related deaths, and access to needle and syringe programmes for people who inject drugs.
- Availability and distribution of naloxone and overdose response training.
- Brief interventions for people presenting to emergency departments with drug-related problems, particularly following an overdose.

- Targeted harm reduction awareness raising in risk areas, including referral to harm reduction services.
- Strengthen low-threshold and outreach interventions, including mobile and peer-led services, to reach people who use drugs who are not in contact with treatment and harm reduction services.

Strengthen monitoring and surveillance through national early warning systems by implementing a multi-indicator approach that integrates statistical data, such as forensic and customs seizures and toxicological analyses, with complementary data sources.

Establish or strengthen multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms. This may involve public health authorities, healthcare providers, law enforcement agencies, customs, forensic and toxicology laboratories, harm reduction services, civil society organisations and people who use drugs to support information exchange and coordinated responses.

Improve the intelligence picture on fentanyl supply, including its sources, physical forms and trafficking routes. This includes close cooperation with law enforcement authorities, particularly customs, and enhanced exchange of operational and strategic information between international partners on seizures, new modi operandi and concealment methods.

Action required

EDAS contact points, together with EUDA NFPs, are recommended to take the following actions:

- Consider disseminating this risk communication to relevant national authorities, including public health agencies, drug treatment services, emergency medical providers, harm reduction organisations, law enforcement agencies, and forensic, customs and toxicological laboratories.
- Maintain a high level of vigilance, closely monitor the opioid market and expedite reporting to EUDA any signals suggesting changes on the opioid market as well as any specific response measures implemented. The information should be reported to EDAS@euda.europa.eu

For Western Balkan partners, this communication is provided for awareness purposes.

Consideration of the above actions and options of response is at the discretion of the national authorities.

Further reading

1. EUDA. Assessing the threat posed by the increased availability, use and harms of highly potent synthetic opioids in the Baltic region (2025). https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/threat-assessment/threat-assessment-report-synthetic-opioids-baltic-region_en.
2. EUDA. Opioid-related deaths: health and social responses (2023). https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/mini-guides/opioid-related-deaths-health-and-social-responses_en.
3. EUDA. Opioids: health and social responses (2021). https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/mini-guides/opioids-health-and-social-responses_en
4. Окръжна прокуратура (Pyce Ruse District Prosecutor's Office); *Official District Prosecutor's Office statement*; 07 August 2026; weblink [here](#)
5. Seized quantities of narcotic substances in Bulgaria by the Ministry of Interior in 2026. <https://www.nfp-drugs.bg/drug-seizures-bg-month-data-mvr-2026/>