

# Community Drug Checking

Thea Oliphant-Wells, MSW

Public Health Seattle & King County

# What is Community Drug Checking?

---

Drug checking:

- allows people to **identify contents** within a substance and make **informed decisions**
- is **paired with other person-centered health services**, including:
  - Syringe services programs, wound care, HIV & Hep C Testing and Treatment, medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD, and overdose prevention sites
- allows the community to **identify new emerging drug threats**, such as contaminants like xylazine

# How do we check drugs?

## Test Strips

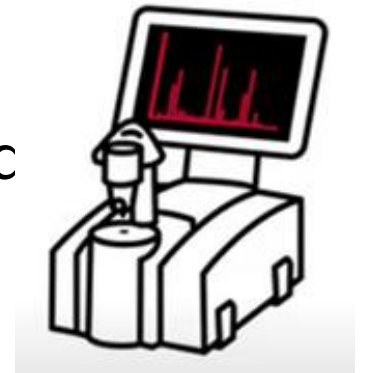
- Single drug: fentanyl, benzodiazepines (ex. Xanax, bromazepam), xylazine, medetomidine
- YES/NO
- Highly sensitive
- False positives with some substances



# How: Spectrometers (fancy science machines)

## FTIR (fourier-transform infrared)

- Shoots a beam of infrared light through the sample and gives a reading to compare with vast libraries of substances
- Can be set up anywhere
- Training is extensive but no background in chemistry required
- Detection limit – about 5%



## GC-MS (gas chromatography mass spectrometry)

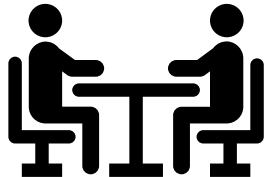
- Lab based testing – scientist required
- Can detect trace amounts

LC-MS testing  
coming soon!

# Typical Drug Checking Encounter



Customer is connected to the Technician. They discuss the type of substance, experience using it, and what technology they are interested in.



Technician explains results, answers questions, and offers harm reduction advice.



FTIR testing is a point-of-care technology that takes about 5-10 minutes for results.

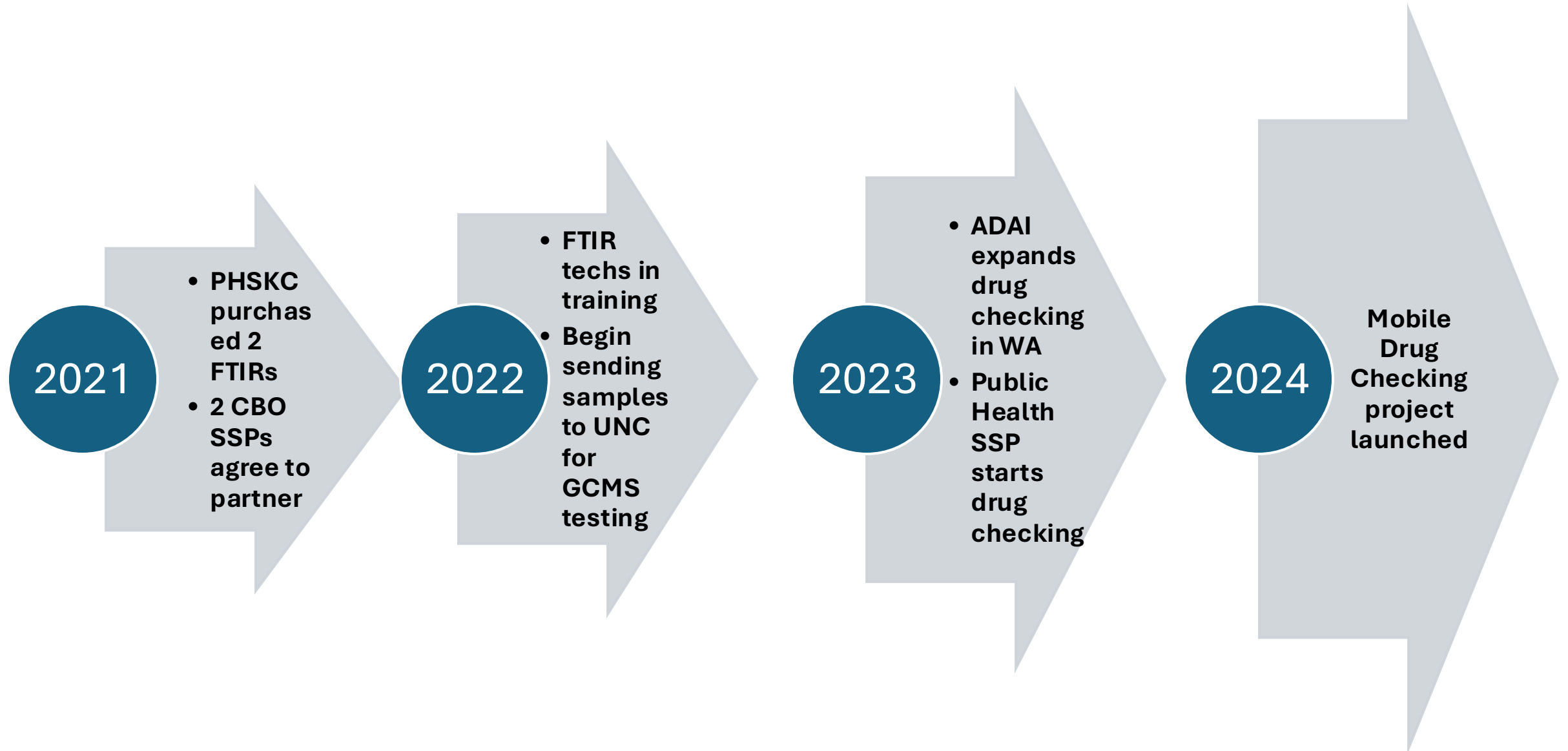


Test Strips are a point-of-care technology that may also be distributed for individual use.



Samples are mailed to lab at UNC for GCMS testing. Results available online or in person in 1-4 weeks.

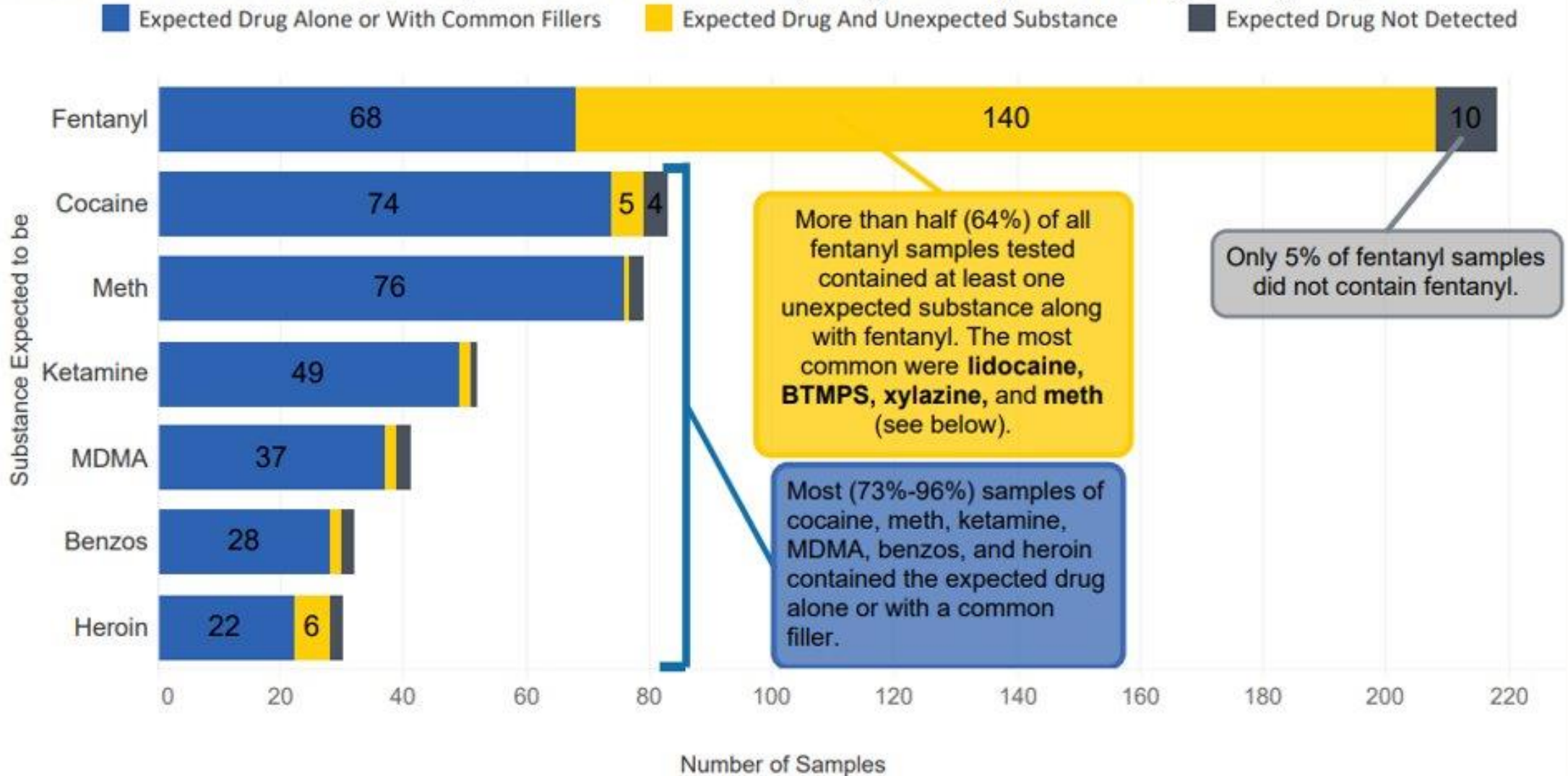
# Community Drug Checking in King County



# 2024 King County Community Drug Checking Results

## What Was Tested in 2024?

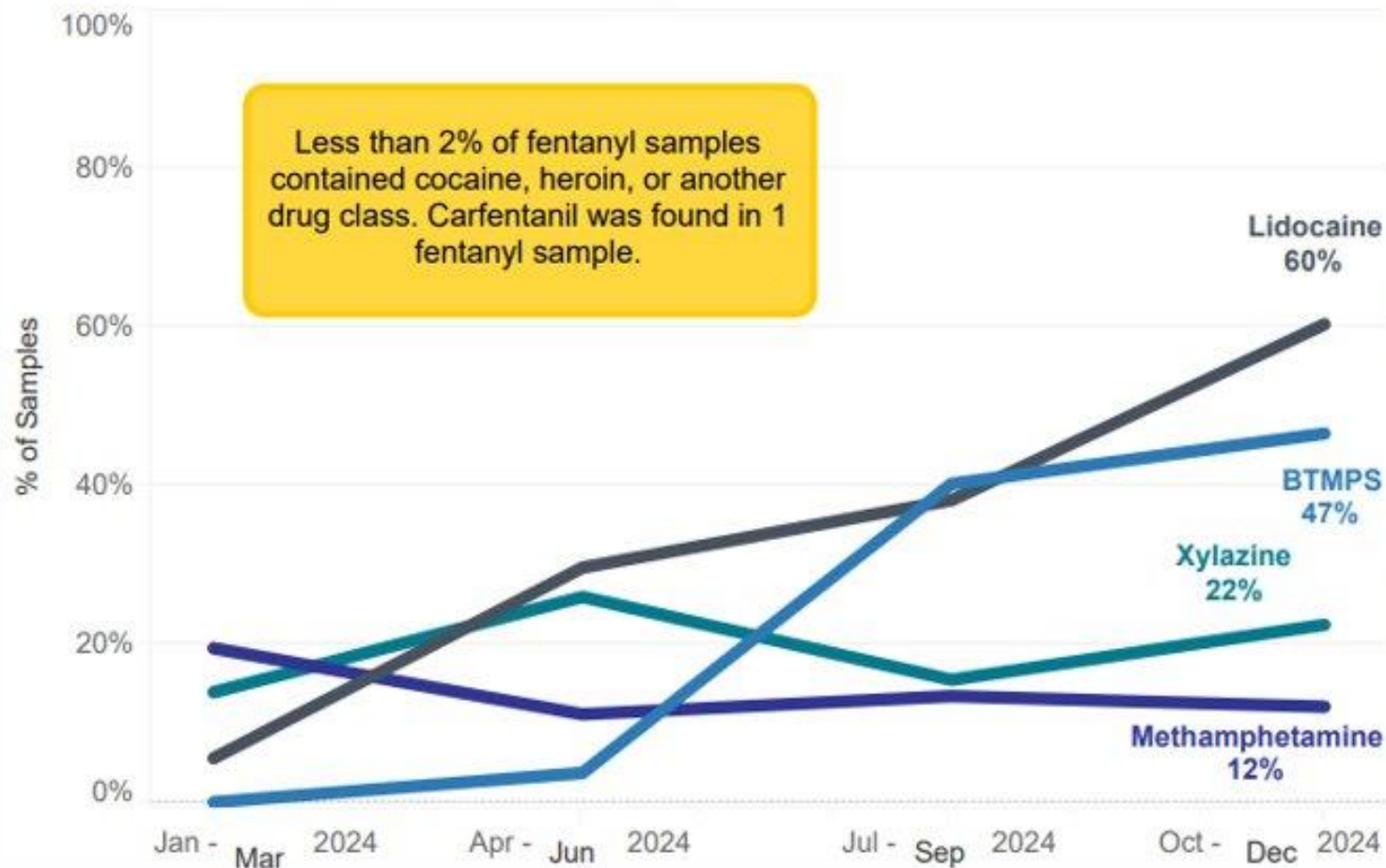
This chart describes the 640 samples tested at community drug checking sites in King County in 2024:





## Unexpected Substances in Fentanyl

In 2024, King County Community Drug Checking sites tested 218 fentanyl samples. They contained the following substances:



### Lidocaine

The percentage of fentanyl samples containing lidocaine increased from 6% to 60% between the start and end of 2024. Lidocaine is a local anesthetic that can cause numbness. Other possible effects are not known.

### BTMPS (also known as "boat glue")

BTMPS was first detected in King County in June 2024. By the end of 2024 BTMPS was present in 47% of fentanyl samples tested. BTMPS is a hazardous industrial chemical with unstudied health effects.

### Xylazine (also known as "tranq")

The percentage of fentanyl samples containing xylazine varied between 14% and 26% across 2024. Xylazine is an animal tranquilizer that increases the risk of overdose and skin infections.

### Meth

The percentage of fentanyl samples containing meth varied between 11% and 19% across 2024.

This report is based only on samples brought to community drug checking, and does not reflect the drug supply of King County as a whole.



## Unexpected Substances in Fentanyl

Between July 2024 and June 2025, King County Community Drug Checking sites tested 448 fentanyl samples. They contained the following substances:

### Lidocaine

The percentage of fentanyl samples containing lidocaine increased over the course of 2024 but decreased in the first half of 2025. Lidocaine is a local anesthetic that, in high doses, can cause heart problems and seizures.

### BTMPS (also known as “boat glue”)

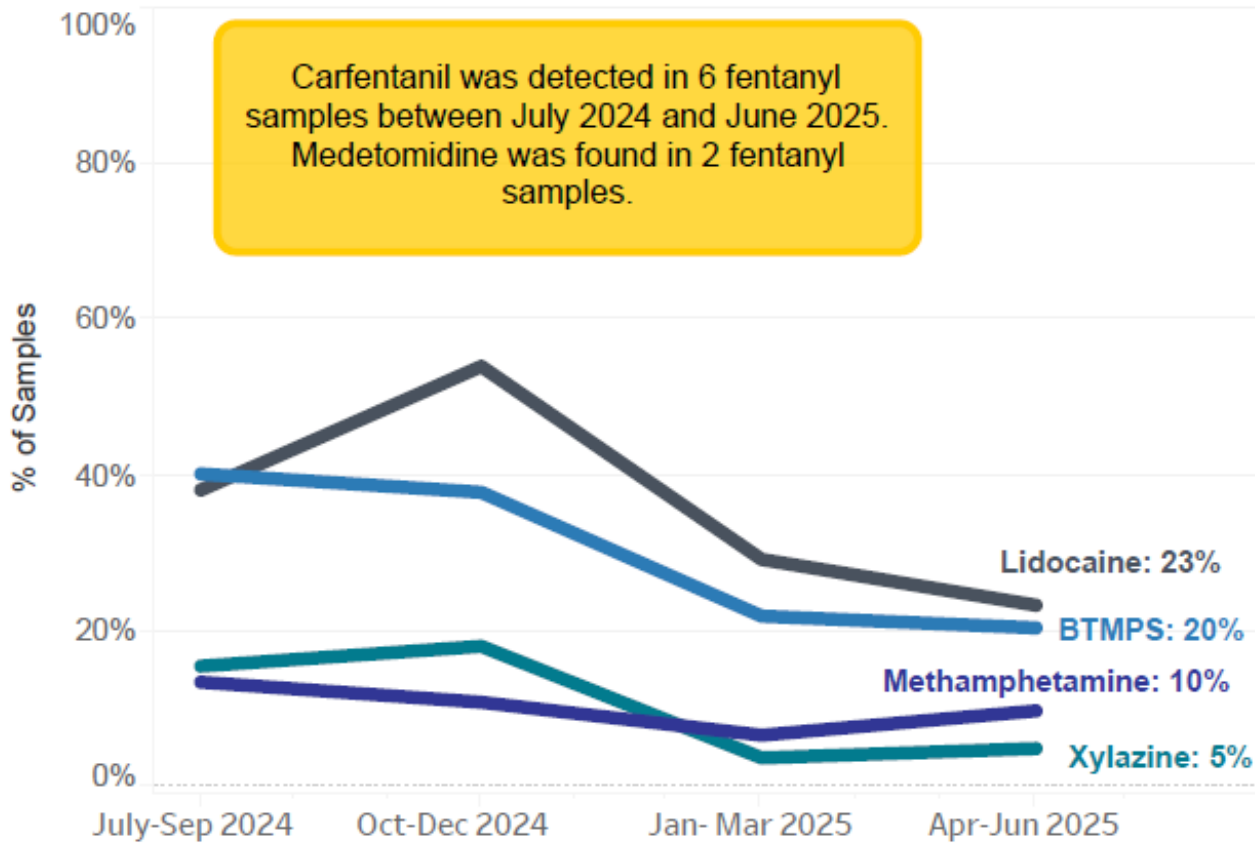
BTMPS was first detected in King County in June 2024. The presence of BTMPS increased in 2024 but then decreased in 2025. BTMPS was present in 20% of fentanyl samples in April-June 2025. The effect of this chemical on humans is unknown. In animals, BTMPS has caused serious damage to the heart, eyes, and other organs.

### Methamphetamine

The percentage of fentanyl samples containing meth varied between 7% and 13% between July 2024 and June 2025.

### Xylazine (also known as “tranq”)

The percentage of fentanyl samples containing xylazine varied between 13% and 26% across 2024 and decreased to 4% to 5% in early 2025. Xylazine is a non-opioid animal tranquilizer that causes skin wounds and infections and may affect overdose risk.



# Legal Landscape

- 2021: drug checking is **illegal** based on state paraphernalia law
- 2023: law changed to allow drug checking equipment and offered legal protections for staff providing the service

this subsection, "drug paraphernalia" means all equipment, products, and materials of any kind which are used, intended for use, or designed for use in planting, propagating, cultivating, growing, harvesting, manufacturing, compounding, converting, producing, processing, preparing, (~~((testing, —analyzing,))~~) packaging, repackaging, storing, containing, concealing, injecting, ingesting, inhaling, or otherwise introducing into the human body a controlled substance other than cannabis. Drug paraphernalia includes, but is

Public Health Seattle & King County  
Overdose Prevention & Response  
401 5th Ave Suite 1110  
Seattle, WA 98104



## **Authorized Community Drug Checking Provider**

For verification that this cardholder is providing services on behalf of Public Health  
please contact:

Thea Oliphant-Wells, Program Manager, Public Health Seattle & King County  
[thea.oliphant-wells@kingcounty.gov](mailto:thea.oliphant-wells@kingcounty.gov) 206-477-8204

Community Drug Checking is an important overdose prevention measure supported  
by Washington State Law. (see other side for RCW)

RCW 69.50.4121(3) states, “Public health and syringe service program staff taking samples of substances and using drug testing equipment for the purpose of analyzing the composition of the substances or detecting the presence of certain substances are acting legally and are exempt from arrest and prosecution under RCW 69.50.4011(1)(b) or (c), 69.50.4013, 69.50.4014, or 69.41.030(2)(b) or (c).”

Community drug checking services in King County are provided by community-based organizations and Public Health in partnership with the University of Washington, Addictions, Drugs, and Alcohol Institute (ADAI).

More info: [adai.uw.edu/WAdata/DrugChecking/](http://adai.uw.edu/WAdata/DrugChecking/)

This service is provided with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Overdose Data to Action grant.

More info: <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/>

# Current Legal Challenges

---

No legal protections for  
drug checking participants

---

SODA (Stay Out of Drug  
Area) Zones

---

Prohibition leads to more  
toxic drugs



# Mobile Services Meet People Where They Are

---

