

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Dec. 13, 2023**



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## **State launches wastewater drug testing dashboard for public high schools**

*First-of-its-kind initiative provides schools, parents, and policymakers with data baselines*

Today, the state released the first set of results of wastewater testing at public high schools on the [Wastewater Drug Monitoring Dashboard](#).

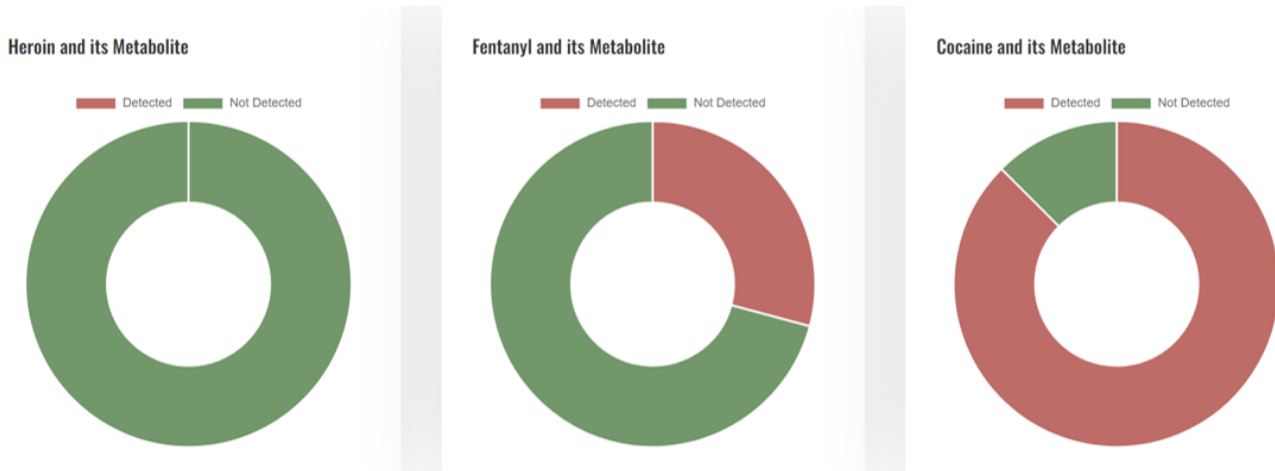
The Department of Health directed wastewater testing for drugs be conducted at public high schools as part of a public health order to address substance misuse in the state. The Department of Health issued the public health order after Gov. Lujan Grisham declared substance misuse a public health emergency in September.

“Knowledge is power, and having more data about the presence of illicit substances in schools informs our collaborative efforts at the school, community, and government levels,” said **Gov. Lujan Grisham**.

Wastewater testing data will help to inform and hone strategies at every level of government going forward. In addition, families, non-profits, community leaders and other partners are key stakeholders in implementing effective strategies. The State is working with schools and community partners to evaluate the data and take action to implement regional and statewide solutions.

Of the first 24 schools that were sampled, 88% tested positive for cocaine or its metabolite and 29% tested positive for fentanyl or its metabolite. Neither heroin nor its metabolite was found in any results. Ninety-two percent of schools tested positive for methamphetamine or its metabolite. However, **it is not possible to distinguish** whether those were the result of legal drug use, such as ADHD medications, or illicit drug use like crystal meth. Metabolites are the chemical compounds that drugs break down into after they are consumed. The human body metabolizes some of the drugs included in this effort very quickly, making them difficult to detect in wastewater unless they are flushed directly or consumed

within a short period of time. Measuring both drugs and their metabolites provides additional evidence as to whether a drug has been consumed.



Wastewater testing is a science-based, proven method of gathering baselines and spotting trends in data around a variety of public health issues. Testing wastewater at schools for illicit drugs provides a clear snapshot of drug use in a campus population on the date that samples were taken. Results do not indicate how many individuals used drugs, the quantity of drugs consumed, where drugs were consumed (i.e. on or off school property), or whether the drugs were used by students, staff, or visitors. Schools where drugs were not detected could still have drug use within the campus community that were consumed on another day when testing did not occur.

"The Wastewater Testing Dashboard sheds light on a complex challenge facing our schools. Of particular note was the pervasive presence of cocaine in the sampling. That's one area where we can improve communications with students right now as parents, school leaders and public health experts," said **Health Secretary Patrick Allen**. "On the other hand, it's clear that prevention efforts work: heroin was not detected in any of the schools so far. These results emphasize the importance of proactive measures, open communication with parents, and a united effort to safeguard our students."

"While these results show widespread use of illicit drugs in our high schools, they also provide us with a vital baseline to measure progress in addressing this issue," said **Environment Secretary James Kenney**. "As we continue to receive results from public schools around the state, we will better understand the geographic differences in substance misuse within communities and develop strategies accordingly."

"Schools are inherently part of the communities they are located in," said **Public Education Secretary Arsenio Romero**. "This data highlights how what affects the community also impacts the schools. This data will inform the efforts already underway by our schools and lead to safer and healthier schools."

Parents should use this information to talk with their children about drugs, including illicit drugs and prescription drug misuse. Prevention is the first line of defense against substance misuse. Families are at the heart of substance misuse and can be active participants in prevention and support efforts. Resources and guidance are available [here](#).

To date, the Environment Department has collected samples at 89 schools throughout New Mexico. Additional results will be posted to the dashboard as they are received from the laboratory on a weekly basis. NMED will sample every public high school in the state.

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