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BREAKING

# Growing Danger Of 'Gas Station Heroin': Kentucky Latest State To Ban Tianeptine—Opioid-Like Drug Sold In Groceries

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**TOPLINE** Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear (D) signed an emergency regulation Thursday banning all products containing tianeptine, citing a warning by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that the opioid-like drug—referred to as “gas station heroin”—has been linked to overdoses, addiction and death over the last two decades.



Tianeptine, or "gas station heroin," was recently banned in Kentucky. GETTY

### KEY FACTS

- Tianeptine, an antidepressant typically used to treat depression, anxiety or asthma, is now a Schedule I controlled substance in Kentucky, [according](#) to an announcement Thursday by Beshear, who said the drug was previously available in dietary supplements online, over the counter in convenience stores and in gas stations throughout the state.
- The drug—banned in Alabama, Michigan, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, Indiana and Ohio—is unapproved and unregulated by the FDA, the agency [noted](#), though other

countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America have approved tianeptine to treat depression and anxiety.

- Some studies have [indicated](#) the drug can be used to treat depression and symptoms of anxiety if prescribed properly—though its effects mimic other antidepressants and anti-anxiety medicines if used in excess, including agitation, high blood pressure, coma or death.
- The clinical effects of tianeptine abuse and withdrawal can also mimic opioid toxicity and withdrawal, [according](#) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which added the drug has the potential to be abused by former opiate drug users.
- Both the CDC and FDA do not indicate when the drug first became publicly available in the U.S., though the CDC [said](#) there were at least 218 calls to poison control centers between 2000 and 2017, while other reports [suggest](#) at least four people have died after using the drug during the same period.

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- The Drug Enforcement Administration [reported](#) in January that tianeptine—consumed in pills in a “salt” form—has been discovered by law enforcement in packages mimicking hydrocodone and oxycodone.

**SURPRISING FACT**

A 64-year-old man **overdosed** on tianeptine in Lowndes County, Mississippi, in January, after he was previously addicted to hydrocodone. Police said the man switched to tianeptine because of its accessibility at gas stations and convenience stores. Sheriff Eddie Hawkins emphasized his concern for the drug's availability, adding “not only are we worried about some dealer selling our kids drugs, we are worried that our 15-year-old kid will get hooked on something he purchased in a convenience store.”

**CRUCIAL QUOTE**

Mississippi State Rep. Lee Yancey (R) **said** tianeptine “was causing so many problems,” adding that state legislators “have letters from family members begging for us to get it off the shelves.”

**BIG NUMBER**

80,411. That's the number of overdose deaths involving any opioid in 2021, **according** to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. West Virginia has the highest **death rate** per 100,000 people in the U.S. at 81.4, followed by Kentucky (49.2) and Delaware (47.3).

**KEY BACKGROUND**

The FDA first **issued** a warning on tianeptine in November 2018, noting the drug—sold by brands like Tianaa and ZaZa in gas stations across the U.S.—was improperly included in dietary supplements. The FDA **said** it was “aware of serious adverse events” associated with tianeptine, though because the drug was not labeled by a Schedule I substance—like heroin or marijuana—law enforcement cannot enforce a nationwide ban, though the FDA noted it was taking regulatory action to prevent its marketing. Some companies have been issued warning letters for selling the drug, the agency said, while it has also issued alerts

to help stop shipments of the drug into the U.S. The most commonly reported health effects from using the drug **include** damaged neurological, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal systems.

**FURTHER READING**

[‘Gas Station Heroin’ Acts Like An Opioid On The Body: Expert \(The Hill\)](#)

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