

Misuse of fentanyl and fentanyl analogues

In July 2017, the then-Home Secretary commissioned the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) to consider fentanyl and fentanyl analogues following the publication of the Drug Strategy 2017.

Prompted by concerns over increased rates of drug-related deaths and growing evidence from law enforcement agencies of fentanyl entering European drug markets, the Home Secretary commissioned the ACMD to write a report on the number and nature of known fentanyl analogues – and their known and likely risk factors.

The ACMD's Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) Committee set out to address this area, and drafted a report which included:

- a literature review on the pharmacology and toxic effects of fentanyl and related analogues
- details of the misuse potential of both pharmaceutical and illicitly manufactured fentanyl compounds
- a summary of the associated harms as documented internationally and in the UK

The ACMD NPS Committee reports that while the UK fentanyl generic has proved to be robust in controlling the majority of fentanyl-related analogues, rates of registered deaths involving fentanyl variants in the UK has steadily increased over the past decade. The rates of fentanyl-implicated drug-related deaths are likely to be under-represented, since sufficiently detailed forensic analyses are not always carried out.

It can be concluded that fentanyl and fentanyl analogues present a significant risk to UK public health. Current monitoring and surveillance systems should be adapted to help identify the true scale of this threat.

'Get quacking' – with less than a month to go

About 5.4 million taxpayers have less than a month to complete their Self Assessment tax returns before the 31 January deadline.

More than 11 million 2018 to 2019 tax returns are due back with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) by the end of January. Around 54% of taxpayers have already filed their returns with more than 5.6 million of those completed

online (89% of the total returns filed).

See support and guidance for Self Assessment on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Angela MacDonald, HMRC's Director General for Customer Services, said:

The Self Assessment deadline on 31 January is fast approaching so customers have just under a month left to file their tax returns online to avoid any unnecessary penalties. Any tax due is also payable by 31 January.

We know that can be a worry, and not only when large sums are involved, so I would urge anyone who is expecting to find it difficult to pay their tax to get in touch with us as soon as possible. We will do everything we can to help and provide practical support.

If you are completing Self Assessment for the first time or are yet to start your 2018 to 2019 tax return, there is a wide range of support and guidance available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) to help at every stage of the process.

For any customers who are yet to start their 2018 to 2019 Self Assessment, [films and webinars](#) can help with each stage of the process, with bespoke guidance for individuals' varying circumstances, including [a video](#) specifically aimed at customers completing a tax return for the first time:

Help is also available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) or from the Self Assessment helpline on 0300 200 3310 and on social media.

People need to complete a tax return if they:

- or their partner received Child Benefit and either of them had an annual income of more than £50,000
- received more than £2,500 in other untaxed income, for example:
 - from tips or commission
 - money from renting out a property
 - income from savings, investments and dividends
 - foreign income
- are self-employed sole traders and earned more than a £1,000
- are a partner in a business partnership
- are employees claiming expenses in excess of £2,500
- have an annual income over £100,000

If customers completed a Self Assessment tax return last year but didn't have any tax to pay, they still need to complete a 2018 to 2019 tax return unless HMRC has written to them to say it is not required.

Customers who are not sure if they need to file a tax return can use the

following tool: [Check if you need to send a tax return.](#)

Self Assessment facts summary:

- 11,718,339 total Self Assessment returns due (11.7 million)
- 6,293,550 total Self Assessment returns filed as at 31 December 2019
- 34,488 returns filed on 31 December 2019
- 5,424,789 million returns still to file, as at 31 December 2019
- 5,630,496 million returns, as at 31 December 2019, filed online (89% of total filed)
- 663,054 million returns, as at 31 December 2019, filed on paper (11% of total filed)
- 17,080 returns filed on 1 January 2020

The penalties for late tax returns are:

- an initial £100 fixed penalty, which applies even if there is no tax to pay, or if the tax due is paid on time
- after 3 months, additional daily penalties of £10 per day may be charged, up to a maximum of £900
- after 6 months, a further penalty of 5% of the tax due or £300, whichever is greater
- after 12 months, another 5% or £300 charge, whichever is greater

There are also additional penalties for paying late of 5% of the tax unpaid at 30 days, 6 months and 12 months. Interest will be charged on all late payments.

Between 30 January and 31 January, our phone helplines shut at 8pm. Customers can contact us via Webchat until midnight both days.

Tax is automatically deducted from the majority of UK taxpayers' wages, pensions or savings. For people or businesses where tax is not automatically deducted, or when they may have earned additional untaxed income, they are required to complete a Self Assessment tax return each year.

Be aware of copycat websites and phishing scams – always type in the full online address <http://www.gov.uk/hmrc> to obtain the correct link to file your Self Assessment return online securely and free of charge.

HMRC uses your home address to determine whether you should be paying UK or Welsh/Scottish Rate of Income Tax, make sure yours is up to date by accessing your Personal Tax Account or <https://www.gov.uk/tell-hmrc-change-of-details>

Customers can also register for HMRC's [help and support email service](#) or by going to GOV.UK and searching 'HMRC videos, webinars and email alerts'.

[Illumina/PacBio abandon merger](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has therefore today confirmed that it will be cancelling its Phase 2 merger investigation.

Illumina, Inc. (Illumina) and Pacific Biosciences of California, Inc (PacBio) are both global suppliers of Next-Generation DNA sequencing systems to organisations across the world, including UK universities, laboratories and research institutes. DNA sequencing systems are vital to the study of genetic variation in humans and other species, for purposes such as essential disease research and drug development.

The CMA launched a Phase 2 inquiry in July 2019 after initial competition concerns led to the proposed merger being referred to a group of independent CMA panel members for an in-depth investigation.

The CMA provisionally found in October 2019 that the merger would result in a significant loss of competition between the 2 companies, with few alternative providers of DNA sequencing systems remaining. The CMA was also concerned that the loss of PacBio as an independent competitor would lead to a reduction in overall levels of innovation in the market. The CMA had proposed that blocking the merger would be the only way of addressing these concerns.

The deal was also being investigated by the US Federal Trade Commission, and the 2 authorities have cooperated closely throughout their respective investigations.

Illumina and PacBio have now decided not to continue with the deal. More information is available on the [Illumina / PacBio case page](#).

[Iran: UK responds to US airstrike on military commander in Iraq](#)

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Measures to make Britain's power network more resilient planned, after August power outage

- new report published on the power outage of 9 August that affected over 1 million customers across Great Britain
- government to implement all 10 clear actions in final report to reduce the likelihood of a similar event happening again
- number of power cuts has shrunk significantly since 1990 alongside a 60% cut in the length of outages

The Energy Emergencies Executive Committee (E3C) has today (3 January) unveiled government-backed plans to strengthen Great Britain's power network and make it more resilient to outages in future.

Business and Energy Secretary Andrea Leadsom has confirmed that the action plan from today's report will be implemented in full, to help prevent and manage future power disruption events, ensuring Britain continues to have one of the world's most reliable electricity systems in the world by:

- assessing the need for improvements to the governance, monitoring and enforcement processes for large and smaller generators
- reviewing the pros and cons of requiring National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO) to hold additional back-up generation
- supporting essential services owners and operators to put in place more robust business continuity plans
- rolling out new communications processes to ensure the general public receives regular updates during any future disruptions

Today's E3C report was requested by Ms Leadsom following the power outage of 9 August, which affected over 1 million customers across Great Britain. The report focuses on the areas of highest impact before, during and after the incident.

Power was restored to disconnected customers within 45 minutes, but the knock-on impact to essential services such as rail were felt for several days after.

Business and Energy Secretary Andrea Leadsom said:

The disruption caused to people and businesses by the power cut in August was unacceptable. However, customers can be confident that we have one of the most robust energy systems in the world and today's report will help us reduce the risks of it happening again and ensure our energy sector is better prepared in the future.

Great Britain has a diverse energy supply and a strong security of supply, which has helped towards halving the number of power outages since 1990. As the UK works to eradicate its contribution to climate change by 2050, the actions in this report will form part of a wider package of work already underway across government and industry to ensure the UK's energy system remains resilient as we transition to clean and affordable energy.

The E3C is made up of representatives from across industry and government including BEIS, Ofgem, the National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO), Distribution and transmission network operators, generators and suppliers and gas distribution network operators.

The E3C will take the actions set out in this report, along with the findings from Ofgem's investigation, to drive forward changes across the sector. The committee will provide quarterly updates to government and Ofgem.

Alongside the E3C report, Ofgem has today published the conclusions of its own investigations into the incident last August, focusing on lessons learnt for the energy sector and voluntary payments totalling £10.5 million for companies involved in the power outages.

The [Ofgem report](#) focuses on the performance of the ESO, National Grid Electricity Transmission, Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) in England and Wales and the 2 generators involved. The Office of Rail and Road has also published findings into the impact on train services.

1. [Read the final E3C report](#).
2. The E3C is a partnership between government, the regulator and industry, which co-ordinates resilience planning across the energy industry. It facilitates a joined-up approach to emergency response and recovery, identifying risks and processes to manage the impact of emergencies affecting the supply of gas and/or electricity to consumers in Great Britain.
3. The power outages were due to the loss of a mix of generation including an offshore wind farm operated by Hornsea One and a gas power station operated by RWE.
4. Ofgem's [State of the Energy Market 2019 report](#) states that the number of power interruptions has fallen by around 50% since 1990, whilst the length of those interruptions has fallen by around 60%
5. The 10 recommendations proposed by the E3C report are as follows:
 - Action 1: The E3C, in collaboration with the relevant trade associations and generators, to disseminate lessons learnt to the wider electricity connected generation community
 - Action 2: The ESO, in consultation with large generators and transmission owners, should review and improve compliance testing and modelling processes for new and modified generation connections, particularly for complex systems
 - Action 3: The E3C, in collaboration with relevant trade associations and the DCRP, to review embedded generators' understanding of, and

- compliance with, the Distribution Code; and assess whether the current governance, monitoring and enforcement processes are fit for purpose
- Action 4: The ESO and DNOs through the Energy Networks Association (ENA), should review the timescales for the Accelerated Loss of Mains Change Programme, and consider widening its scope to include distributed generation that unexpectedly disconnected or de-loaded on 9 August
 - Action 5: The ESO, in consultation with industry, should undertake a review of the Security and Quality of Supply Standard (SQSS) requirements for holding reserve, response and system inertia
 - Action 6: The E3C, through the DNOs and the ENA, to undertake a fundamental review of the Low Frequency Demand Disconnection (LFDD) scheme including its application and administration by the DNOs, and present options for short- and long-term improvements
 - Action 7: E3C to scope and define what an essential service is, and better understand their capacity to deal effectively with power disruptions
 - Action 8: E3C to develop and deliver guidance for essential services owners/operators, to support contingency, continuity and resilience planning
 - Action 9: E3C, through the Communications Task Group (CTG), to develop and test a comprehensive communications strategy for use by industry and government
 - Action 10: E3C, through the CTG, to develop and test revised operational protocols and frameworks for communications between wider industry during incident response scenarios