

Drug advice

Toxic ‘alkaloid’ poppies diverted from a regulated crop

➤ Alkaloid poppies produce unpredictable, potentially life-threatening effects

A significant quantity of **alkaloid poppy plant ‘heads’** (pictured), grown for the pharmaceutical industry, was recently stolen from a property in Victoria. These poppies are very different from traditional opioid poppies and contain **dangerously high concentrations of thebaine and oripavine**, with risk of **life-threatening toxicity**. They contain only **tiny (‘trace’) amounts of traditional opioids** like morphine and codeine.



Thebaine is very different from the opioids in traditional opium-poppies. Thebaine does not produce pain relief, sedation or euphoria. Thebaine stimulates the nervous system and can lead to **seizures, high body temperature, and life-threatening toxicity**. **Any exposure to thebaine may cause toxicity.**

Oripavine has some opioid activity but is different from morphine and codeine. Oripavine can produce opioid-like effects such as sedation, slowed breathing, and small pupils. However, oripavine is not used medically because it can also cause **severe toxicity** (agitation, seizures) and life-threatening complications at high doses. The effects may be **unpredictable**, particularly when **combined with thebaine**.

Naloxone will reverse the opioid effects of oripavine but will not reverse the toxic stimulant effects. Naloxone will not reverse thebaine toxicity.

➤ Be cautious of any dried, powdered, or liquid poppy flower product

Poppy plant products may include dried flower heads (without petals), ground poppy-plant material, or liquid preparations derived from poppy plants. **These products may contain high concentrations of thebaine and oripavine that lead to life-threatening toxicity.**

In 2022-2023 at least 40 people experienced life-threatening effects following consumption of thebaine-contaminated poppy seed ‘tea’ – including agitation, muscle twitching, high body temperature and seizures.

➤ Reduce the risk of harm

If you experience toxic drug effects, or are present when someone has an unexpected reaction, **seek help immediately by calling Triple Zero (000)**.

All alcohol and other drug use comes with risks, so:

- **Be aware** that other false or contaminated drug products may circulate in Victoria, even if no specific warning has been issued about them.
- **Get free naloxone and carry it with you** – no matter what drugs you think you’re getting.
- **Start low and go slow**, and make sure you’re in a **safe environment** with **people you trust**.
- **Remember**, even ‘pure’ drugs can produce serious side effects and death and can interact dangerously with medications/pharmaceutical drugs. Get the facts from [the Alcohol and Drug Foundation website](#).

Contact **Harm Reduction Victoria’s DanceWize team** for anonymous support and education from peers. Talk to DanceWize volunteers by email at info@dancewize.org.au.

If you or someone you know needs help with alcohol or drug use, call DirectLine on 1800 888 236 or visit directline.org.au for information and support to access treatment.