

## "HOT SHEET"



## 4TH QUARTER - 2024

**Objective:** The goal of this, and subsequent bulletins, is to provide information regarding identified changes in drug trends, and/or to educate and forewarn about newly identified substances.

**Subject Matter:** This release attempts to provide information regarding the synthetic drug known as "pink cocaine" or "Tusi," which has begun to be distributed in multiple illegal drug markets in the United States. This stimulant has gained popularity in nightclubs and on the dark web, raising questions about its composition and effects. As the distribution of "Tusi" continues to rise, this information is being presented to provide guidance on what this substance is and why it potentially poses a threat to public health and safety.

## Origins and Spread of Tusi

### Development in Colombia

Tusi, also known as "pink cocaine," originated in Colombia around 2010. Despite its name, this synthetic drug is not actually cocaine. It's a mixture of various substances, typically including ketamine, MDMA, and caffeine, often dyed pink and given a strawberry flavor to make it more appealing. [1] The drug's name comes from the phonetic translation of "2C," a psychedelic phenethylamine compound synthesized by chemist Alexander Shulgin in the 1970s. However, modern "Tusi" rarely contains 2C and has evolved into a diverse cocktail of substances. [1]



### Common Street Names:

"Tuci"	"Pink Lady"
"Tusi"	"Pink rosa"
"Tucibi"	"Pink"
"Pink Cocaine"	"Rosa"
"Pantera rosa"	"Pink panther"



Source: San Jose Police Department

### Expansion to other countries

By 2015, "Tusi" had begun to spread beyond Colombia's borders. That year, United States and Colombian authorities arrested 18 members of a group called "Los Pri," who were trafficking "Tusi" to five countries: the United States, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. [2] As the drug gained popularity, Colombian refiners began exporting their knowledge, teaching dealers across Latin America how to create their own versions of "Tusi."

The drug's expansion was rapid. By mid-2022, "Tusi" had become popular in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Spain, and Panama. Reports of its presence have also surfaced in Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay. [2] This spread has been accompanied by a significant price drop, with the cost per gram falling from \$71 in 2012 to under \$10 in Colombia by mid-2022. [2]

### Introduction to the US market

"Tusi" has recently gained traction in the United States, particularly in New York and California. Its introduction to the U.S. market has been facilitated by Mexican cartels, who are always looking to profit from new drug trends. The Sinaloa Cartel, for instance, has been involved in trafficking "Tusi" alongside their traditional drug operations. [3]

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### "Tusi" vs Traditional Drugs

#### Comparison to cocaine/MDMA

Despite its nickname "pink cocaine," "Tusi" bears little resemblance to traditional cocaine. While cocaine is derived from the coca plant, "Tusi" is a synthetic concoction created in laboratories. The composition of "Tusi" varies widely, but it typically contains a mixture of ketamine, MDMA, and caffeine, often dyed pink and given a strawberry flavor.<sup>[1]</sup> Unlike cocaine, which is classified as a Schedule II controlled substance in the United States due to its potential medical applications, "Tusi" has no recognized medicinal use.<sup>[4]</sup>

Although "Tusi" often contains MDMA, its effects can be quite different from pure MDMA or ecstasy. The presence of ketamine in "Tusi" creates a unique combination of stimulant and dissociative effects. However, the inclusion of other substances like LSD or methamphetamine in some batches can introduce additional effects not typically associated with MDMA alone.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### Trends in Usage / Effects on the body

"Tusi" is typically ingested as a pill or snorted as a powder, with injection being less common.<sup>[2]</sup> Its use is predominantly associated with party and club settings, rather than regular consumption.<sup>[1]</sup> The effects of pink cocaine can be wide-ranging and potentially dangerous due to its varied composition. Users may experience a combination of stimulant and hallucinogenic effects, including increased energy, euphoria, and altered perceptions.<sup>[5]</sup> However, the drug can also cause adverse reactions such as anxiety, vomiting, loss of consciousness, increased heart rate and blood pressure, and in severe cases, seizures or abnormal heart rhythms.<sup>[1] [5]</sup>



Source: Anonymous



Source: Getty Images

#### Appeal to users

"Tusi's" popularity stems from several factors that make it attractive to drug users. Its bright pink color and sweet smell, often resulting from food coloring and artificial flavoring, give it a distinctive appearance that sets it apart from other street drugs.<sup>[1]</sup> The colorful presentation and party-enhancing effects have contributed to its rise as a popular club and rave drug, where there's a constant demand for new substances.<sup>[2]</sup>

Although "Tusi" had historically been viewed as a substance used by the "elite," it currently can have a relatively low price point, compared to traditional cocaine, which has made it more accessible to a broad range of users from various socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>[2][3]</sup>



## Law Enforcement Challenges

### Detection and testing difficulties

The emergence of “Tusi” has presented significant challenges for law enforcement agencies. One of the primary issues is the difficulty in detecting and testing this synthetic drug. Unlike traditional substances, “Tusi’s” composition varies widely, making it challenging to identify using standard drug tests. Handheld Raman spectrometer’s have proven effective in identifying common components of “Tusi” such as ketamine, MDMA, and methamphetamine at trace levels.<sup>[6]</sup> This capability allows officers to analyze surfaces of packages and baggies without risking exposure to unknown drug powders, a crucial precaution given the prevalence of lethal fentanyl in the drug market.

### Legal classification issues

The legal classification of “Tusi” poses another hurdle for law enforcement. While most of the substances likely to be found in “Tusi” are illegal and strictly controlled, the drug itself doesn’t exist as a single entity.<sup>[1]</sup> This ambiguity complicates legal proceedings, as it’s possible to create a batch of “Tusi” from harmless and legal household items. The varying composition of “Tusi” from batch to batch further complicates efforts to classify and regulate it consistently.

### International trafficking networks

“Tusi’s” spread has been facilitated by sophisticated international trafficking networks, particularly Mexican cartels. These organizations have developed global supply chain networks, utilizing chemical companies and pill press manufacturers in China to obtain precursor chemicals and equipment.<sup>[7]</sup> They operate clandestine labs in Mexico to produce the drugs and then use vast distribution networks to transport them into the United States. The Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels, in particular, have established a presence in every U.S. state, effectively eliminating competition in domestic markets.<sup>[7]</sup>

These cartels employ various tactics to conceal their operations, including hiding chemicals among legitimate commercial goods, mislabeling containers, using front companies, and shipping through third-party countries. The use of encrypted messaging applications and social media for drug sales further complicates law enforcement efforts.<sup>[7]</sup> To combat these challenges, agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) have launched initiatives such as Operation Overdrive and Operation OD Justice, targeting violent individuals and investigating fatal drug poisonings.<sup>[7]</sup>



Source: San Jose Police Department

## Conclusion

The rise of pink cocaine “Tusi” in the US drug market has sparked growing concern among law enforcement and health professionals. Its unpredictable composition and effects pose significant risks to users, while its appealing appearance and relatively low cost contribute to its increasing popularity. The involvement of international drug cartels in its distribution further complicates efforts to curb its proliferation. This trend highlights the ongoing challenges in addressing the evolving landscape of synthetic drugs and their impact on public health and safety.

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