

What You Need to Know About Youth and Xylazine

WHAT IS XYLAZINE AND WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT?

Xylazine is a veterinary tranquilizer that is not approved for human use and emerged as a contaminant in the opioid drug supply in 2019.^{1,2} When used in combination with opioids, is known to prolong the euphoric and sedative effects of opioid intoxication. In 2023, the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) declared fentanyl adulterated with xylazine an emerging threat.³

Xylazine is usually found in combination with illicitly manufactured fentanyl, which is the leading cause of teen overdose deaths.⁴ Xylazine may also be present in any illicitly manufactured drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and pressed pills.⁵

Youth may be exposed to xylazine through accidental or intentional consumption of illicit substances.¹ It is important to note that xylazine is often consumed unintentionally⁵ and cannot be detected by looking at, smelling or touching a substance.

Xylazine (pronounced *zai·luh·zeen*) is sometimes called “*tranq*,” “*tranq dope*,” “*zombie drug*” or “*sleep cut*.”^{1,6}

It may be harder to reduce overdoses where xylazine is involved than overdoses from opioids alone.

Naloxone should be given in response to *any suspected overdose* and rescue breaths should be given if the individual is not breathing normally.⁷ Although naloxone cannot reverse a xylazine overdose, since xylazine is often found with opioids,^{2,5} it can reverse the effects of opioids when both opioids and xylazine are involved.⁷ It is important to call 911 any time you administer naloxone and find follow-up medical treatment for any continued effects of xylazine.

As of July 2023, xylazine is most commonly found in the drug supply in the northeastern and southern United States. However, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that between 2020 and 2021, overdose deaths where xylazine was detected increased by as much as 1,127% in the south and west.^{2,5}

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS OF XYLAZINE?

Xylazine depresses the central nervous system and may lead to sedation, difficulty breathing, dangerously low blood pressure and slowed heart rate.⁷ This increases the risk of overdose and death when using substances.⁷

Repeated or long-term xylazine use, whether injected, snorted, sniffed or swallowed, is associated with skin wounds that can require daily care to avoid amputation.^{1,8} Xylazine wounds initially look like small, purple or red bruises, birth marks or blisters and can progress to darkly colored open wounds with necrotic tissue.^{1,9}

REDUCING THE RISKS OF XYLAZINE EXPOSURE

Xylazine Test Strips (XTS) are a drug testing tool used to detect the presence of xylazine in substances an individual plans to use and may be available through local community harm reduction programs or for purchase online from manufacturers.¹⁰ Fentanyl test strips can be used to test the same sample of drugs for fentanyl, but fentanyl test strips alone will not detect any xylazine present.

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