

Xylazine Fact Sheet

“Xylazine is making the deadliest drug threat our country has ever faced, fentanyl, even deadlier,” said DEA Administrator Anne Milgram. “DEA has seized xylazine and fentanyl mixtures in 48 of 50 States. The DEA Laboratory System is reporting that in 2022 approximately 23% of fentanyl powder and 7% of fentanyl pills seized by the DEA contained xylazine.”

Xylazine was detected in about 800 drug deaths in the U.S. in 2020, most of them in the Northeast. By 2021, it was present in more than 3,000 fatalities — with the most in the South — according to a DEA Report in 2022.

On April 12, 2023, the White House designated fentanyl combined with xylazine as an emerging threat to the United States.

What is Xylazine?

Xylazine (often called Tranq) is a non-opioid drug used in veterinary medicine for sedation, anesthesia, muscle relaxation, and analgesia in animals such as horses, cattle, and other non-human mammals. Xylazine is only authorized for veterinary use in the U.S., according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and is not currently a controlled substance under the U.S. Controlled Substances Act. However, some states are passing legislation making xylazine a controlled substance on a state level.

Xylazine was approved for veterinary use in 1971. Veterinarians can purchase xylazine directly through a pharmaceutical distributor in liquid form (vial or preloaded syringe based on the general size and weight of animal).

In the early 2000s, xylazine was first reported as an adulterant (cutting agent) in Puerto Rico through DEA reporting and laboratory analysis. Ten years later it was documented on the island as a drug of abuse on its own. Xylazine has shown up in supplies of illicit drugs used by humans in major quantities in only the last several years, creating a higher risk of overdose. Illicit sales of xylazine are often made online in liquid or powder form, often with no association to the veterinary profession nor requirements to prove legitimate need.

Limited research is available on xylazine’s effect on humans and some information has been gathered through reports of drug users. At one time, xylazine was being studied for its use in humans as an analgesic, hypnotic, and anesthetic, but these clinical trials were terminated due to its severe hypotension and central nervous system depressant effects.

Illicit Drugs & Xylazine

Xylazine is often added to illicit drugs such as fentanyl, cocaine, and heroin to lengthen its euphoric effects and/or increase street value by increasing the weight of the drug. Xylazine users report injecting, snorting, swallowing, or inhaling the drug.

Overdose deaths involving xylazine are linked to other drugs including cocaine, alcohol, benzodiazepines, methadone, and prescription opioids. Xylazine is most encountered in combinations with two or more substances. People who use illicit drugs may or may not be aware of the presence of xylazine. Users may believe they are using cocaine, but instead the drug includes a deadly dose of xylazine as well. While some users seek out substances that include xylazine.



Side Effects of Xylazine and Other Facts

The main source of information on xylazine side effects in humans is reported from users since standard drug trials have not been conducted on humans.

Side Effects include:

- Sedation
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Dangerously low blood pressure
 - Slowed heart rate
 - Wounds that can become infected
 - Severe withdrawal symptoms
 - Death
- Taking opioids along with xylazine and other depressants (like alcohol) increases the risk of fatal overdose.
 - Repeated and long-term injection use of xylazine can also cause skin ulcers, abscesses, and related complications, which gives it the nickname “zombie drug.”

- Xylazine is addictive. Users may develop a physical dependence and some users report withdrawal symptoms from xylazine as, or more, severe than from heroin or methadone.
- When xylazine is combined with fentanyl or other opioids it greatly increases the potential for fatal overdoses.
- Xylazine is not an opioid and therefore will not respond to naloxone (opioid overdose reversal medication). However, experts recommend giving naloxone during an overdose because xylazine is commonly combined with opioids and symptoms are similar.
- Naloxone will help to restore breathing if an opioid was also used, but it will not restore breathing from the effects of xylazine.
- Xylazine has no approved antidote for human use. You should always call 911 when you suspect an overdose.

Resources

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Fact Sheet on Xylazine

[https://www.dea.gov/diversion.usdoj.gov/drug_chem_info/Xylazine.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/diversion/usdoj.gov/drug_chem_info/Xylazine.pdf)

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/xylazine>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/other-drugs/xylazine/faq.html>

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Report “The Growing Threat of Xylazine and its Mixture with Illicit Drugs”

<https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/The%20Growing%20Threat%20of%20Xylazine%20and%20its%20Mixture%20with%20Illicit%20Drugs.pdf>



To find the toolkits and other prevention resources visit:

<http://www.kansaspreventioncollaborative.org>

<http://www.dccca.org/prevention-resources>

Or follow this link to
access this toolkit and
other helpful resources:

