

Facts on Xylazine:

Emerging Drug Misuse and Mixed Use

Xylazine is a veterinary tranquilizer that is cut into street drugs like fentanyl to prolong their effects. It is known by names such as “**tranq**” or “**tranq dope**.” Xylazine is a central nervous system depressant, not an opioid. Drugs with xylazine were first seen in Puerto Rico. Today, they are being found in more and more locations across the United States, including here in Washington, DC. In 2022, approximately 23% of fentanyl powder and 7% of fentanyl pills seized by the DEA contained xylazine. DC’s Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has observed an increasing presence of xylazine in opioid related deaths. Overdose deaths in DC involving xylazine doubled between 2020 and 2021, and then doubled again between 2021 and 2022.

What are the effects of xylazine?

Profound sedation and intense withdrawal.

Xylazine slows breathing and heart rate, as well as decreases blood pressure, compounding some of the effects of opioids like fentanyl. Used alone or together with fentanyl, xylazine can induce a blackout for many hours, which makes people vulnerable to physical and sexual assault, robbery, and exposure to the elements.

Xylazine produces withdrawal symptoms similar to those caused by opioids, but unlike those symptoms, there are no medications to treat xylazine withdrawal.

Skin wounds and rhabdo.

Xylazine causes severe wounds with dark, scaly, dead tissue called eschar. These wounds occur regardless of how people use—smoking, snorting, swallowing, or injecting—and often occur away from the injection site in people who inject drugs. The wounds spread and worsen very quickly, and can lead to amputation if not treated.

Xylazine also causes rhabdomyolysis or “rhabdo,” which can be fatal or result in permanent disability. Rhabdo is a condition in which muscle tissue breaks down due to long periods without moving, causing muscle pain and cramps, dark urine, tiredness, and weakness. It is important to move people into a different position every two hours so they do not develop rhabdo or pressure sores.

People with either of these conditions should seek medical attention immediately. Also help them find a location to treat their skin wounds. You can use the services by ward map at myrecoveryDC.org.

Overdose.

Xylazine and fentanyl mixtures place people who use drugs at a higher risk of fatal overdose. Because xylazine is a sedative and not an opioid, naloxone will not reverse an overdose of tranq. However, because xylazine is often mixed with other opioids such as fentanyl or heroin, it is important to treat any overdose with naloxone to counter the effect of the opioids if present.

If you are facing opioid addiction, for help and hope:

- 1) Carry naloxone (NARCAN).** If you need more, text LiveLongDC to 888-811 to find naloxone nearby. You can even get it delivered. Remember—no ID. no cost. no prescription.
- 2) Tell someone that you’re using.** If no one is with you, use the Never Use Alone hotline, 800-484-3731.
- 3) Start low and go slow.**
- 4) Effective Treatment is Available.** Recovery from opioid addiction is possible. Call 988 or go here to find a clinic near you.



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What should we do if someone overdoses while using xylazine?

Want to learn more?

- **DEA Public Safety Alert,**
March 20, 2023
- **FDA Alert,**
November 8, 2022.

Call 911.

Get help immediately. If the person does not wake up, they will need more advanced care.

Administer naloxone as you normally would.

Give naloxone to someone you suspect is overdosing, since xylazine and opioids, including fentanyl, are often found in combination. If someone is overdosing while using tranq dope, naloxone can address the opioid overdose and restore breathing but may not wake them completely. If the person starts breathing again but is still sedated, they don't need more naloxone. Put them in rescue position and keep an eye on them until medical help arrives. Remember, you will not hurt someone by giving them naloxone if it turns out they are not overdosing on opioids.

Focus on breathing more than consciousness.

With xylazine, the immediate goal is to make sure the person is breathing, so they are getting oxygen into their brain. If available, administer oxygen immediately. If not, start rescue breathing (1 breath every 5 seconds), which can help even if the person doesn't wake up. Continue until the person either starts breathing on their own or emergency medical services (FEMS) arrives.