



Public Health

County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

POST OFFICE BOX 962, 1080 Emeline Ave., SANTA CRUZ, CA 95061-0962

TELEPHONE: (831) 454-4000 FAX: (831) 454-4488 TDD: Call 711

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

To:	Santa Cruz County Healthcare Providers
From:	Gail Newel, MD, MPH, County Health Officer
Subject:	Alert on presence of xylazine in illicit fentanyl
Date:	March 28, 2023

Situational Update:

Xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer with no approved human use, is showing up in the nation's street drug supply, where it is also known as "tranq" and "tranq dope." Xylazine is typically combined with opioids like fentanyl and sometimes heroin and is increasingly present in overdose deaths compounding the overdose crisis. Philadelphia and other areas in the Northeast have been heavily impacted. There is no evidence to suggest that xylazine is currently prevalent in California's drug supply, however experts note that xylazine may be mirroring the path of fentanyl in the illicit drug market with a westward expansion and is likely underreported.

Reported effects of xylazine in humans include central nervous system and respiratory depression, low blood pressure, slow heart rate, drowsiness and lethargy. Xylazine use is also associated with necrotic skin wounds located beyond the injection site. The human impact of these severe wounds, which can require amputation, has been chronicled in the news media. When xylazine is stopped abruptly, severe withdrawal symptoms may develop.

A sedative and not an opioid, xylazine is not known to be reversed by naloxone. Testing for xylazine and xylazine metabolites is available through both clinical drug screens and toxicology panels. No FDA medication is approved for xylazine withdrawal.

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Since xylazine is typically combined with opioids, **administering naloxone is still recommended for reversing an overdose.** Health care professionals should consider potential xylazine exposure when patients presenting with an overdose do not respond to naloxone. In these situations, health care professionals should provide supportive measures and consider screening for xylazine using

appropriate tests. Health care professionals who see patients with severe, necrotic skin ulcerations should consider repeated xylazine exposure as part of the differential diagnosis. Additionally, health care professionals caring for patients with opioid use disorder (OUD) should monitor patients for withdrawal symptoms not managed by traditional OUD treatments, as this may indicate xylazine withdrawal.

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health posted some approaches that are being used to help with withdrawal from xylazine. (See Additional Resources) Stigma associated with substance use and shame from the serious wounds associated with xylazine use can lead to delays in care and worse health outcomes, underscoring the need for providing compassionate care to patients. Harm reduction is an important approach. (See Additional Resources)

The FDA encourages health care professionals and patients to report adverse events resulting from possible xylazine exposure to their local health department, poison center, and FDA's MedWatch Adverse Event Reporting program. Complete and submit MedWatch reports online at www.fda.gov/medwatch/report.htm; or download and complete the form, then submit it via fax at 1-800-FDA-0178.

The FDA is particularly interested in obtaining information that health care professionals feel is relevant to better understand the patterns and impact of xylazine use, including, but not limited to: geographic location of xylazine exposure; additional substances involved in suspected xylazine-involved overdose; responses to naloxone or other agents in the context of overdose (including information on dose, route, duration, and outcome); and clinician experience treating skin ulcerations and withdrawal symptoms.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [CDPH Health alert on presence of xylazine in illicit fentanyl](#)
- [FDA warns about the risk of xylazine exposure in humans](#)
- [The Philadelphia Department of Public Health Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction/Health Update on xylazine](#)
- [The Harm Reduction Coalition/XYLAZINE](#)
- [CDPH Overdose Prevention Initiative \(OPI\)](#)
- [California Health and Human Services Agency/ Brief on xylazine](#)
- [CDPH Substance And Addiction Prevention Branch-What is Xylazine?](#)

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.