

MYTHS VS FACTS

NIH
HEAL
INITIATIVE

Xylazine

Xylazine (also called “Tranq” or “Tranq Dope”) is a non-opioid used as a sedative for animals. It is not approved for use in humans, but it has been found in the illicit drug supply (often with heroin or fentanyl) to act as a filler or cause a stronger effect.¹

HEALing Communities Study
Kentucky

Xylazine has been found in samples of fentanyl in Kentucky and is associated with an increased risk of overdose when used with opioids.²

MYTH

You can tell whether xylazine is present just by the way a drug looks

FACT

Xylazine powder appears similar to fentanyl or heroin powder. Similar to fentanyl test strips that can help people who use drugs to detect fentanyl in their drug supply, there are xylazine test strips that have recently been developed. Research on their effectiveness is ongoing.

MYTH

Xylazine is only mixed with heroin or fentanyl

FACT

In a study of the spread of this drug in the US, xylazine was commonly found in people using fentanyl, cocaine, methamphetamine, and Delta-9-THC.³ Naloxone, while not a reversal agent for xylazine, should always be available when people are using any drug. People who use drugs should not use alone so that there is someone available to reverse an overdose with naloxone and call for help.

MYTH

Someone who passes out from xylazine use is not likely to die from an overdose

FACT

Xylazine significantly increases the risk for overdose when used with other drugs.² While there is no antidote for xylazine, it is safe to use naloxone in people who are unresponsive or with shallow/decreased breathing, as xylazine is commonly mixed with opioids. You can also provide rescue breathing. Always call 911 if you suspect an overdose because additional medical support may be required to save a life.

MYTH

You only get wounds from xylazine if you're injecting the drug

FACT

Severe skin ulcers and wounds have been seen in people using xylazine even when they do not use IV.⁴ Please seek care from a health provider for any skin concerns. If you are unable to get to a health provider immediately to evaluate these wounds, try to keep the area clean to prevent infection and seek help as soon as possible.

MYTH

You can't withdraw from xylazine

FACT

Increased anxiety, irritability, sweating, racing heart rate, and trouble sleeping are common with xylazine withdrawal.⁵ While there are no guidelines on withdrawal management, health providers can use medications that reduce the discomfort of xylazine withdrawal.