



Increase in "Zombie Drug" Deaths

Xylazine, known by the street name "tranq" is a veterinary tranquilizer used to sedate large animals. It is not approved for human use.

Xylazine slows the heart rate, restricts breathing and dangerously lowers blood pressure levels. Continued use of the drug can cause abscesses, skin ulcers and severe wounds from the death of cells in skin tissue and organs. Users have suffered amputation of limbs due to xylazine abuse. Because xylazine can cause gruesome, lingering sores, along with the stupor it induces, it has become known as "the zombie drug."

Illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin are mixed with xylazine, either to enhance drug effects or increase street value by increasing their weight. People who use illegal drugs may not be aware of the presence of xylazine in the drug they are using.

Drug dealers also often mix xylazine with fentanyl. This mixture has contributed to an

increase in fatal overdoses. Law enforcement agencies have seized xylazine and fentanyl mixtures in 48 of 50 states, and the DEA laboratory system reported that approximately 23% of fentanyl powder and 7% of fentanyl pills seized by the DEA in 2022 contained xylazine.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that there has been more than a 34-fold increase in fatal overdoses involving xylazine since 2018, but due to underreporting, that number could actually be much higher.

Limiting Supply of Xylazine

Xylazine is a legal drug that has been repurposed for illegal use. It needs a veterinarian license to buy, but some suppliers are selling it online to individuals who have no connection to the veterinary trade.

To try and limit the supply of xylazine, some states in the U.S. have implemented different measures. For example, Pennsylvania has added xylazine to its list of banned substances in an effort to strengthen drug restrictions and empower police to prosecute individuals who break them.

Ohio's governor signed an executive order banning xylazine through the state's Board of Pharmacy in March, and West Virginia's governor signed legislation making it a restricted substance.

In April, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy officially designated fentanyl adulterated or associated with xylazine as an emerging threat to the United States.

Preventing Xylazine Deaths

Drug free workplace programs can help stop the abuse of xylazine by providing employees with drug education that increases awareness. Employees need to be aware of the increasing presence of xylazine in the drug supply and how to respond to xylazine-involved overdoses.

In the event of a suspected xylazine overdose, experts are recommending that people use naloxone (an opioid overdose reversal medication), because xylazine is often combined with opioids. However, because xylazine is not an opioid, naloxone does not address the impact of xylazine on breathing and may not be as effective for some xylazine-related overdoses.

According to the CDC, when an individual is exhibiting signs and symptoms of possible overdose involving xylazine and/or opioids, the following actions should be taken:

- **Call 911.** Stay with the person until first responders arrive. Overdose is a medical emergency. First responders can assess the situation and provide treatment.
- **Give naloxone.** Naloxone can reverse the effect of any opioids and will not cause harm if opioids are not involved in an overdose. However, because naloxone will not address the impact of xylazine on breathing, effects of xylazine may continue after naloxone is given.
- **Give rescue breaths.** First responders have reported that rescue breaths are especially helpful for people who have used xylazine because it causes breathing to slow down. To give rescue breaths to adults, make sure the person's airway is clear; place one hand on the person's chin, tilt the head back, and pinch the nose closed. Place your mouth over the person's mouth to make a seal and give two slow breaths. Watch for the person's chest (but not the stomach) to rise and follow up with one breath every five seconds.



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