

## Hot Tips: Public Health Advisory

### #132 Date: 3/21/2023

Please copy and distribute to ALL physicians at your location.

### *Xylazine-Associated Toxicity*

#### Key Messages

- State officials are warning the medical community and the public of the increasing emergence of xylazine-adulterated drugs. More common in the Northeast but now starting to appear in California, illicit fentanyl is being cut with xylazine.
- Consumption of xylazine-containing drugs is associated with severe to life-threatening outcomes, including an increased risk of overdose death as well as the development of necrotic skin wounds. Xylazine causes significant respiratory depression.
- Xylazine, also known as “Tranq”, is resistant to naloxone treatment used to combat fentanyl overdoses. There is no commonly accepted antidote. Treatment is supportive.
- Prompt recognition of potential signs of exposure to this substance is necessary to mitigate its effects.

#### Situation

The FDA has warned that xylazine – a non-opioid tranquilizer commonly used in veterinary care – is not safe for human consumption and has been linked to increasing reports of serious side effects and overdose deaths. It is not approved for use in humans. Xylazine’s street name is “tranq”; it is used for blending with opioids for economic reasons and because it augments the effects of these drugs. Xylazine may be found in up to 15% of illicit fentanyl products. Due to the frequent combination of xylazine with opioids, experts recommend the use of naloxone for overdose reversal. However, naloxone does not mitigate or reverse the effects of xylazine toxicity as the drug is not an opioid itself. This often results in decreased patient response to naloxone treatment.

As xylazine is not detected by routine toxicology screens, it is important for healthcare providers to be aware of the clinical presentation resulting from xylazine toxicity. Along with its association with increased risk of overdose, another notable side effect attributed to use of this substance involves the development of severe necrotic skin ulcerations (Figure). These lesions have led to the appellation “zombie drug”. Treatment of these wounds and resulting infections can be quite

challenging. Chronic use of xylazine-containing products has also been associated with hypotension, bradycardia, vasoconstriction, and both CNS and respiratory depression. Additional side effects observed include disorientation and areflexia. In overdose patients who respond poorly to naloxone, consideration should be given to xylazine intoxication to ensure that the patient receives the critical respiratory and cardiovascular supportive care.

For further information regarding xylazine-associated toxicity and local updates or resources, please visit [CDPH | Xylazine](#) .

**Figure:**

Xylazine-induced leg cellulitis, wound infection, and osteomyelitis



Source: Malayala, Srikrishna V, et al. "Xylazine-Induced Skin Ulcers in a Person Who Injects Drugs in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA." *Cureus*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.28160>

This bulletin is intended to improve the public health in our county by keeping physicians and nurses informed of noteworthy diagnoses, disease trends, and other events of medical interest. Another goal of a public health department is to educate. We hope that you will use this information to increase your awareness. Please allow us to continue in our role of speaking to the press so that we may maximize the educational message to the benefit of all citizens of Ventura County.