

Xylazine: What You Need to Know

What is xylazine (zye-luh-zeen)?

Xylazine is a drug used in animals, such as horses, for sedation, numbing, and muscle relaxation. It is not an opioid (like fentanyl or oxycodone), but can increase the harmful effects of opioids.

- **Xylazine is found mixed with drugs** like heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamines. It is also called “tranq,” “zombie drug,” or “sleep cut.”
- Xylazine is linked with **overdose deaths**.
- **You can't tell whether a substance contains xylazine** by how it looks, tastes, or cooks.

How is xylazine harmful?



It can cause:

- deep sedation/sleepiness, blackouts, and loss of consciousness.
- decreased breathing, blood pressure, and heart rate.
- severe wounds, which can spread and worsen quickly. They can occur whether xylazine is *injected, snorted, or inhaled*.

Long-term effects are not known.

How to reduce risk of harm

The only way to be sure you will not be harmed by xylazine is to **avoid using non-prescribed drugs**. If you are using these drugs, there are ways to **reduce** your risk of harm:

Never take drugs alone

- **Have at least one person who can check on you**, call 911, or use naloxone.
- Consider calling **Never Use Alone** (1-800-484-3731) if you plan to use alone.
- Xylazine can cause you to fall asleep for a long time. Make sure you and your belongings are in a safe place. Be in a comfortable position, not laying on top of your arms or legs. (This could stop blood flow to your limbs.)

Test product first

- **Test for xylazine** using test strips from harm reduction programs, where available. A negative result does not guarantee the substance does not contain xylazine.

Take less; go slow

- If you use, take a **small amount** of drug first. Wait several minutes between doses.

Use safer injection practices

- **Use new/sterile needles** and sterile injection equipment. **Do not share or reuse**.
- **Clean skin with alcohol wipes** and let air dry completely before injection.
- If you are not able to wait for a new needle, clean the needle with bleach and clean water using the instructions found **here**: <https://tinyurl.com/CDCcleansyr> or use the QR code to the right.
- **For safer injection practices, visit** <https://tinyurl.com/VAADPWID> or use the QR code to the right.



Safer injection practices



How to clean needles

How to reduce risk of harm *(continued)*

Seek medical care for skin wounds

- Do not inject any drug into wounds or areas around a wound.
- Monitor any skin wounds closely.
- Xylazine wounds often start as small red blisters that can appear anywhere. They can worsen quickly into large, deep wounds if not treated.
- Keep cuts/wounds covered and clean with soap and water. Avoid alcohol or hydrogen peroxide which can dry the wounds too much.
- Don't scratch or pop the wounds.
- **Seek emergency care immediately if:**
 - any skin starts to change color (gets darker).
 - any skin becomes hard or soft, or loses sensation.
 - you have signs of infection (fever, chills, nausea, injection site feels hot or smells).

NALOXONE: Naloxone will not reverse the effect of xylazine, but it will help if opioids are present.

Carry naloxone

- Ask a VA provider for naloxone.
- Carry and know how to use naloxone.
- Make sure you and people near you (family/friends) know where to find naloxone and how to use it.



What should I do if someone has overdosed or is not responding?

- **Call 911 and use naloxone.**
- **Naloxone** will not reverse the effects of xylazine, but it will help if opioids, such as heroin or fentanyl, are making it hard to breathe.
- **Stay with the person;** check that they are taking at least 10 breaths per minute.
- If you must leave, place them in the **recovery position** to protect the airway (laying on the side with head supported).



Recovery position

Help is available

- **VA offers harm reduction, evidence-based therapy, and medicines** to help with your recovery journey. Help is available in outpatient, inpatient, and residential settings. To learn more, contact your VA provider or visit the website (QR code below as well): <https://tinyurl.com/VASubstanceUse>.
- Harm reduction programs in your area: <https://nasen.org>
- CDC Xylazine FAQ: www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/other-drugs/xylazine/faq.html

Preventing overdose



HIV & other infection information



VA substance use services

