

Xylazine: What You Need to Know

What is xylazine (zye-luh-zeen)?

- Xylazine is a non-opioid sedative or tranquilizer. It is approved for use in animals but is too dangerous for use in people.
- **Xylazine is found mixed with drugs** like heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamines. It can sometimes be called “tranq,” or “sleep cut.”
- It is **not** an opioid (like fentanyl or oxycodone), but it can increase the harmful effects of opioids.
- **You cannot tell if a drug contains xylazine by how it looks, smells, or tastes.**
- Xylazine is linked with **overdose deaths**.

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 there who can check on you**, call 911, or use naloxone.
- Xylazine can cause you to fall asleep for a long time. Make sure you and your belongings are in a safe place. Before using, lay down or sit to avoid falls or injuries from not moving for several hours. Do not lay on top of your arms or legs because it could lower blood flow to those parts of your body.

Test the drug first

- **Test for xylazine** using test strips from harm reduction programs or community syringe service programs, where available.
- Remember, a negative result does not guarantee the substance is free of xylazine.

Take less; go slow

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

Use safer injection practices if injecting drugs

- **Use new/sterile needles** and sterile injection equipment. **Do not share or reuse.**
- **Clean injection site** with alcohol wipes and let air dry completely before injecting.
- If you cannot wait for a new needle, please follow the instructions found here to ensure you are cleaning your syringe correctly: <https://tinyurl.com/CDCcleansyr>
- For information on safer injection practices, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/VAADPWID>



Safer injection
practices



How to clean
needles

How to reduce risk of harm *(continued)*

Seek medical care for skin wounds

Xylazine wound care



- **Monitor any skin wounds closely.** Xylazine wounds often start as small blisters that can appear anywhere, not just at the injection site. Xylazine wounds can worsen quickly into large, deep wounds if not treated. Do not scratch or pop the wounds.
- **Self-care tips for wounds:**
 - Clean hands with soap and water before touching wounds or wear gloves.
 - Wash the wounds daily with plain soap and warm water, pat dry with a clean cloth, and cover lightly with petroleum jelly before bandaging. Wrap the bandage just enough to keep it in place (not too tight) to protect the wound.
 - Clean and change bandages daily whenever possible.
 - Do not use alcohol and/or hydrogen peroxide on the wound because they can dry out the wounds too much.
- **Seek medical care as soon as possible if you have a wound and:**
 - fever or chills
 - severe pain at the wound site
 - skin that is red, hard, and hot to touch
 - thick, smelly, yellow or green discharge coming out of the wound
 - pieces of skin falling off
 - bone is showing
 - new numbness (lack of feeling) or tingling on skin
 - inability to move the body part where wound is located

Carry naloxone

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



Naloxone will not reverse the effects of xylazine, but it may help if opioids, such as heroin or fentanyl, are making it hard to breathe.

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

- **Call 911 and use naloxone.**
- 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).



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 www.va.gov/directory/guide/SUD.asp or www.va.gov/recovery.
- **CDC Xylazine FAQ:** www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/about/what-you-should-know-about-xylazine.html

Preventing overdose



HIV & other infection information



Your path to recovery (va.gov)



How to use naloxone video

