

## NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT

### Xylazine-related Overdose Warning

April 6, 2023

#### Background:

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) recently issued an alert regarding overdose deaths in the US linked to Xylazine, a non-opioid central nervous system depressant. It is used as a sedative, anesthetic, muscle relaxant, and analgesic in veterinary medicine and has not been approved for use in humans. Xylazine is usually mixed with other illicit drugs, like fentanyl, because it causes the effects of opioids to last longer. In New Mexico, six xylazine-involved deaths were reported in the last five years. Xylazine is an unscheduled drug that is easily accessed, so its presence in the illicit drug supply may increase over time, due to its low cost. Reports indicate that xylazine, alone or in combination with other drugs, is administered by injecting, snorting, swallowing, or inhaling it.

#### Recommendations for Clinicians:

- **Overdose signs and symptoms:** Look for the following signs and symptoms in a patient with suspected xylazine-involved overdose: dry mouth, drowsiness, hypertension, and tachycardia followed by hypotension and bradycardia, hyperglycemia, reduced heart rate, hypothermia, coma, respiratory depression, and dysrhythmia.
- **Complications of Xylazine use:** Look for the following complications in a patient with repeated use of xylazine (whether used by itself or mixed with other substances):
  - Soft tissue injuries (skin ulcers, abscesses) that can necrotize. Wound care is crucial to avoid further complications. Wounds are atypical and often present in sites other than the injection site and appear to worsen more quickly than other injection-related soft tissue damage.
  - Xylazine withdrawal is not a well-defined syndrome. It includes anxiety, irritability, and restlessness. Severe hypertension is also possible. Some users have reported that xylazine withdrawal symptoms could be as, or more, severe than from heroin or methadone. Those symptoms include sharp chest pains and seizures.
  - Xylazine withdrawal has been treated with benzodiazepines and/or alpha-2 adrenergic agonists, clonidine, dexmedetomidine, tizanidine, guanfacine.<sup>4</sup>
- **Treatment for suspected overdose:**
  - If a xylazine overdose is suspected, it is still recommended to administer naloxone to try and reverse the overdose, due to the frequent use of xylazine with opioids. Individuals

experiencing a xylazine related overdose may begin to breathe normally after naloxone administration but still be sedated from the effects of xylazine.

- Breathing and airway should continue to be monitored as sedation effects could lead to suffocation. Additional doses may be needed as effects from naloxone may wear off before the sedation effects of opioids and xylazine wear off.
- Naloxone may appear ineffective in xylazine-involved overdoses. There is no reversal agent for xylazine that is safe for use in humans.
- Supportive care is recommended, including rescue breathing. Blood pressure may be unstable and in need of monitoring or intervention.

- **Detection:**

- Xylazine is not included in routine immunoassay toxicology screens and therefore may be under-detected. Detection of xylazine in biological fluids in humans involves various screening methods, such as urine screenings, thin layer chromatography (TLC), gas chromatography mass spectrometry (GC-MS) and liquid chromatography mass spectrometry (LC-MS). Even with appropriate testing, xylazine may not be detected due to xylazine's rapid elimination from the body, with a half-life of 23-50 minutes.
- Xylazine test strips have been developed, but as yet there is limited information on their accuracy.

**Additional Resources:**

1. FDA Healthcare Professional Alert - <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-alerts-health-care-professionals-risks-patients-exposed-xylazine-illicit-drugs>
2. National Institute on Drug Abuse - <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/xylazine>
3. What Clinicians Need to Know (New York State Department of Health) - <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/12044.pdf>
4. Kariisa M, Patel P, Smith H, Biting J. Notes from the Field: Xylazine Detection and Involvement in Drug Overdose Deaths — United States, 2019. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021; 70:1300–1302
5. Ehrman-Dupre, R., Kaigh, C., Salzman, M., Haroz, R., Peterson, L. K., & Schmidt, R. (2022). Management of Xylazine Withdrawal in a Hospitalized Patient: A Case Report. *Journal of addiction medicine*, 16(5), 595–598.)

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**EPIDEMIOLOGY AND RESPONSE**

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**Please Note** that our system also utilizes text messaging to notify members of important health information. Due to FCC Regulation changes that are designed to decrease the amount of unwanted spam text messages sent each year to citizens, please save, this phone number **(855) 596-1810** as the “**New Mexico Health Alert Network**” default phone number for your account used for text messages on the mobile device(s) you register with us.