

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT

Xylazine Detected in NM Drug Supply

May 1, 2024

Background:

Xylazine, a non-opioid, central nervous system depressant, was found in 3 street drug samples tested through the New Mexico State Adulterant Checking Program last week. The xylazine was detected at testing sites in Albuquerque and Espanola. Xylazine, also known as “tranq,” is an alpha-2 agonist used as a veterinary sedative that is not approved for use in humans. While it has been present in the street drug supply in the eastern United States for years, it has not previously been confirmed in locally acquired street drugs in New Mexico. Xylazine is usually mixed with illicit fentanyl to prolong the opioid effect.

Xylazine can cause unresponsiveness or decreased consciousness, low blood sugar, low blood pressure, slowed heart rate, and respiratory depression. Xylazine can also cause skin ulcerations and necrosis at injection sites or other areas of the skin. Xylazine wounds can also appear when the individual is using alternate routes of administration such as inhaling vapor (“smoking”) or snorting.

The adulterant checking program, which began in November 2023, is overseen by the Department of Health and allows individuals to have street drugs tested for unexpected adulterants. Currently, testing is offered at one site in Albuquerque and one in Espanola.

Recommendations for Clinicians:

- **Treatment for suspected overdose:**
 - Opioid overdoses involving xylazine present similarly to uncomplicated opioid overdose. Xylazine can potentiate the effects of other depressants, such as fentanyl and heroin.
 - While xylazine alone does not cause the severe respiratory depression observed with opioid intoxication, the profound mental status depression may cause airway compromise leading to suffocation.
 - Naloxone should be administered for respiratory depression because xylazine and fentanyl are typically found together. Individuals may begin to breathe normally after naloxone administration but still be sedated from the effects of xylazine.
 - There is no reversal agent for xylazine that is safe for use in humans.
 - Supportive care, including rescue breathing, is recommended. Blood pressure may be unstable and in need of monitoring or intervention.

- **Wound Care:**
 - While xylazine-associated wounds have been recognized as a distinct clinical entity, their etiology is not well understood. Suggested mechanisms of xylazine-associated wounds include peripheral vasoconstriction leading to poor perfusion and necrosis, and small

vessel disease⁷. These wounds can progress quickly and become necrotic. They are not limited to injection sites but can occur elsewhere on the body.

- In January 2024, the City of Philadelphia Department of Public Health published comprehensive wound care guidelines: [Recommendations for Caring for Individuals with Xylazine-Associated Wounds \(phila.gov\)](#)
 - Keep wounds CLEAN using soap and water. Avoid using alcohol and hydrogen peroxide.
 - Keep the wound bed MOIST using Medi honey, Vaseline, etc. This promotes autolytic debridement. Enzymatic or sharp debridement of eschar may also be necessary.
 - Keep the wound COVERED – use a non-adherent dressing (Xeroform®) covered by rolled gauze, Coban or ace bandage. Use an absorbent dressing such as calcium alginate instead of Xeroform® if the wound is draining.
 - Keep skin around the wound protected and moisturized (A+D ointment or Vaseline).
 - Antibiotics as appropriate for superinfection or cellulitis. Silver sulfadiazine is a preferred topical antibiotic therapy for xylazine-associated wounds.
 - Manage pain.
- **Withdrawal:**
 - Xylazine withdrawal is not a well-defined syndrome. It includes anxiety, irritability, and restlessness. Tachycardia and severe hypertension are also possible.
 - Xylazine withdrawal has been treated with benzodiazepines and/or alpha-2 adrenergic agonists, clonidine, dexmedetomidine, tizanidine, guanfacine.⁷
- **Detection:**
 - Xylazine is not included in routine immunoassay toxicology screens and therefore may be under-detected. 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 are available through harm reduction sites, including public health offices and will soon be available to order, at no cost, through [NMHarmReduction.org](#).

Additional Resources:

1. Harm reduction providers can be located through the website [NMHIVGuide.org](#)
2. Naloxone can be ordered at no cost online at [NMHarmReduction.org](#).
3. Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction. [Recommendations for Caring for Individuals with Xylazine-Associated Wounds \(phila.gov\)](#). January, 8th, 2024.
4. CDC Xylazine Resources: [Xylazine Resources | Drug Overdose | CDC Injury Center](#)
5. What Clinicians Need to Know (New York State Department of Health): [Xylazine: What Clinicians Need to Know \(ny.gov\)](#)
6. Xylazine and Wound Care for Providers: [Xylazine Provider Info \(pa.gov\)](#)
7. Best Practices for Management of Xylazine Withdrawal and Xylazine-related Overdose: [CAMP-Xylazine-Best-Practices-1.pdf \(penncamp.org\)](#)

New Mexico Health Alert Network: To register for the NM Health Alert Network, please visit the following site <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjz/10b2> Please fill out the registration form completely and click Submit at the bottom of the page, to begin receiving Important health alerts, advisories, and updates.

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.