



Safer Smoking of Crack and Methamphetamine: A Bulletin on Fentanyl, Xylazine, and Levamisole

From The Massachusetts Drug Supply Data Stream (MADDS)

Smoking is a safer alternative to injecting, but overdose and other health problems can still happen when smoking crack or methamphetamine. Learn more about other substances to watch out for that may have harmful effects when smoked: fentanyl, xylazine, levamisole.

What You Should Know if You Smoke

These 3 substances are fairly common additives in drugs that are smoked.

- **Fentanyl:** A highly potent opioid with a high risk of overdose. Fentanyl may slow or stop breathing, cause unresponsiveness, or decreased levels of consciousness. Fentanyl has been seen in cocaine powder/rock forms (see images) as a contaminant and sometimes thought mistakenly by consumers to be cocaine/crack.
- **Xylazine:** A long-acting, sedating chemical, not an opioid. It can cause decreased consciousness, increased unresponsiveness, low blood sugar, slowed heart rate, and reduced breathing. In Massachusetts, xylazine has primarily been detected in opioids.
- **Levamisole:** A common active cut in cocaine/crack due to similar appearance. It enhances the euphoria associated with cocaine because it has amphetamine-like effects. It may give cocaine a shiny, fresh look, but it is not easily recognizable without drug checking. Levamisole can cause purple skin lesions, weakened immune system, and other health problems.

Cocaine Samples with Fentanyl



Rock cocaine or "crack" with fentanyl

Images courtesy DrugsData.org



Pipe with residue of crack cocaine with fentanyl



Talking to People Who Use Stimulants About Safety

- 1. Can I rock the fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine out of cocaine or crack?**
No, rocking does not remove the fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine from cocaine or crack.
- 2. Can I use alcohol to remove fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine from cocaine or crack?**
No, alcohol does not remove fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine from cocaine or crack.
- 3. Does smoking crack burn off the fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine?**
No, smoking crack does not burn off or destroy fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine. If fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine is mixed in with the crack, when the sample is heated, vapors of these substances are produced and can be inhaled. It is possible to smoke fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine and experience effects of these substances.
- 4. But I smoke meth, can I burn fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine off of the meth?**
No, you cannot burn fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine off of meth. If fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine is mixed in with the meth, when the sample is heated, vapors of these substances are produced and can be inhaled. It is possible to smoke fentanyl/levamisole/xylazine and experience effects of these substances.
- 5. What are the best practices for testing crack and meth using a fentanyl test strip (FTS)?**

Crack and meth can be tested for fentanyl using a fentanyl test strip (FTS). Follow testing instructions based upon the materials and drug you have: Use a small amount of water (1 ml) if testing residue like in a cooker and more water (5ml) if testing crack or other non-meth drug, and always 30ml for meth. Get more info at streetcheck.org.

For Xylazine Info and Other Resources



Health Risks and Harm Reduction Tips

- Taking too much of a stimulant—by injection, snorting, or smoking—may lead to overheating, heart attacks, seizures, and strokes: **call 911**. Combining fentanyl or other opioids with stimulants on purpose or by accident increases the risk of overdose.
- Levamisole can cause: purple skin lesions, kidney disease, fever, fatigue, flu-like symptoms, night sweats, weight loss, and a weakened immune system. **Seek medical care** if symptoms arise and get them checked out.
- Xylazine can contribute to oversedation alongside opioids. Although naloxone will not reverse oversedation from xylazine, it WILL reverse slow or stopped breathing from fentanyl. So **give naloxone** if someone is not breathing enough and **give rescue breaths or chest compressions** until they are breathing on their own. For more on xylazine, scan the QR code above.
- The drug supply is unpredictable. Carry naloxone and call for help in the event of an overdose. **Check with your local harm reduction program** for safer smoking supplies, fentanyl test strips, advice on safer use, and drug checking with MADDS.

*All samples were provided by harm reduction programs or donated by police departments for MADDS testing. MADDS is a state-funded collaboration between Brandeis University, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, various town police departments, and local harm reduction agencies. For more information, scan the QR code above, visit streetcheck.org, or contact us at maddsbbrandeis@gmail.com.