



Massachusetts Drug Supply Stream (MADDS) Street Narcotics Alert: Xylazine

Active cut alert: Xylazine is on the rise in fentanyl & heroin

- Since initial reporting by MADDS in 2021, the veterinary sedative xylazine has increasingly been detected in opioid samples in Massachusetts statewide as an active cut in fentanyl/heroin. About 1 in 4 heroin/fentanyl samples also contain xylazine.
- Xylazine is a **long-acting sedative**, being found in opioids. If someone is not responding to naloxone, it is possible that xylazine is contributing.

Xylazine is an active cut in other drugs, primarily opioids, and people may not know that their drugs contain xylazine, which is why it's important to be aware of the harmful effects of xylazine, including oversedation, skin ulcers, infection, and other serious injuries.

Xylazine is a health hazard

- Xylazine can cause **unresponsiveness**, unconsciousness, low blood sugar, low blood pressure, slowed heart rate, and reduced breathing. It is typically found in drugs also containing fentanyl or heroin, and this mixture may increase risk of overdose or death.
- Xylazine increases **risk for skin ulcers** in places on the body where people inject or have cuts. Skin ulcers from xylazine may quickly lead to infection or tissue death.
- If oversedated or unresponsive for long periods, people may have **serious injuries** like damage to muscles, nerves, and kidneys if blood flow is restricted to a part of the body for a long time. If use occurs outside, oversedation may increase risk for hypothermia or heat-related emergencies.



Examples of xylazine samples collected by MADDS

How to identify xylazine

- Xylazine appears as a brown or white powder and has also been found in counterfeit pain pills (see photos above).

How to respond

- Summon medical attention. Monitor oxygen levels and breathing if a person appears unresponsive. **Give naloxone** (see box at right). Start rescue breathing immediately if breathing stops or the person's oxygen levels get too low.
- If you suspect someone has a **skin ulcer** or a **serious injury** from complications related to xylazine, encourage them to seek care immediately or offer to transport them to the nearest medical facility.
- Talk to providers and community members about the harms of xylazine in the drug supply. When conducting post-overdose or community outreach, offer sterile syringes and wound care kits to help prevent infection.

Xylazine and naloxone: Xylazine can contribute to oversedation alongside opioids. Naloxone may not reverse the effects of xylazine, but ALWAYS administer naloxone in a suspected overdose. Naloxone will reverse the effects of any opioids present. The person may remain unresponsive if xylazine is present. Give rescue breaths to support their breathing.

