

# Massachusetts Drug Supply Data Stream (MADDS)

## Community Drug Supply Bulletin: Two Active Cuts

### *Xylazine in Fentanyl & Heroin*

- Multiple samples sold as fentanyl and heroin have been confirmed to contain the veterinary sedative xylazine *in addition to fentanyl, heroin, or tramadol*.
- From June 2020 to February 2021, MADDS detected xylazine in 35 samples statewide. Samples contained an increasing ratio of xylazine as an active cut: xylazine increased from a rarely present, low-ratio substance to a high-ratio active drug component for substances sold as dope/heroin/fentanyl.
- Samples containing xylazine included powdered residue in bags and cookers or cottons used for injection.
- Xylazine is a long acting and **sedating medication**, but it is not an opioid. Most user experiences were not provided or were unremarkable. 5 of 35 samples containing xylazine were associated with a fatal or nonfatal overdose that also involved fentanyl.

### *Health Effects*

- Xylazine can cause decreased level of consciousness/unresponsiveness, low blood pressure, a slow heart rate, and decreased breathing. Because it is often combined with other sedating drugs like opioids, there is an increased risk for overdose or death.
- Narcan has not been documented to reverse xylazine's sedating effects but will stop an opioid overdose if the substance used also contained fentanyl, heroin or another opioid. When responding to a xylazine-involved overdose with Narcan, the person's breathing may return but they may still appear sedated. Seek medical assistance if you suspect a xylazine-involved overdose.
- Injecting xylazine may increase risk of **skin ulcers**.

**Active cuts** are additives that **affect the user experience**. Inactive cuts are additives that do not affect the user experience. Active cuts, like xylazine and phenacetin, can have important adverse health effects which is why it is important to learn about additives.

### *How to Identify the Substances*

- Both phenacetin and xylazine appear as a white crystalline solid and easily blend into powdered street drugs. They are difficult to identify without analytical testing.
- All samples were provided by harm reduction programs or donated by police departments for MADDS testing. If you have suspicions about the makeup of a drug, contact MADDS about drug checking.

### *Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention*

- The drug supply is unpredictable. It is safer to use when other people are present or can check on you frequently. People using together should take turns to prevent simultaneous overdose. Administer Narcan and call for help in case of overdose, prolonged sedation, or other adverse reaction. You can get Narcan at [harm reduction programs](#) and [retail pharmacies](#) without a prescription.
- Use a sterile syringe for every injection to prevent infection.
- Contact a local harm reduction program for help with abscess or wound care, more advice on safer use, and availability of drug checking with MADDS.

### *Rising Phenacetin in Cocaine*

- From June 2020 to February 2021, 29 samples sold as cocaine have been confirmed to contain phenacetin in addition to cocaine statewide.
- Phenacetin is a common active cut for cocaine due to its similar appearance to cocaine. It is also a pain reliever, similar to acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- While not a new additive, phenacetin has become the most prevalent active cut for cocaine in Massachusetts during the pandemic. Phenacetin occurs in a higher ratio to cocaine in these drug samples.
- Samples containing phenacetin were found as powdered residue in bags, rock crystals, and in cookers or cottons used for injection.

### *Health Effects*

- Phenacetin is a pain medication/fever reducer that was removed from the US and European medications market due to kidney damage and urothelial cancer risk. Prolonged use of phenacetin, especially among people with **kidney or liver problems**, can cause serious organ damage. Ingestion of a high concentration of phenacetin in drug samples may accelerate these health concerns.
- Healthcare providers caring for people who use cocaine should consider increased monitoring of kidney and liver function.

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