Active Cut Update: Xylazine in Fentanyl & Heroin

From June 2020 to February 2021, MADDS detected the veterinary sedative xylazine in 35 samples statewide. Samples contained xylazine as an active cut. Multiple samples sold as fentanyl and heroin have been confirmed to contain xylazine in addition to fentanyl, heroin, or tramadol.

Xylazine is a long acting and sedating medication, but it is NOT an opioid. Five samples containing xylazine were associated with a fatal or nonfatal overdoses that also involved fentanyl.

How to identify Xylazine

Xylazine appears as a white crystalline solid and easily blends into powdered street drugs.

How to Respond

Summon medical attention. Naloxone/Narcan will not reverse the effects of xylazine, but ALWAYS administer naloxone if symptoms present as a possible opioid overdose. If xylazine was involved, the person may still appear sedated after their breathing has returned.

Active Cut Update: Phenacetin in Cocaine

The most prevalent active cut for cocaine in current Massachusetts samples is phenacetin, a pain and fever reducer. Although it may not be immediately life-threatening or have notable side effects, prolonged use of phenacetin can cause serious kidney or liver problems.

MADDS is a state-funded collaboration between Brandeis University researchers, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, various town police departments and local harm reduction agencies. Contact us at maddsbrandeis@gmail.com.