

Massachusetts Drug Supply Data Stream (MADDS) STREET NARCOTICS UPDATE

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.

ACTIVE CUTS are additives that affect the substance user's experience, while inactive cuts are additives that do not. Active cuts like xylazine can have serious adverse health effects, so it is important to be aware of them when present.

Health Effects

- Xylazine can cause a decreased level of **consciousness and unresponsiveness**, low blood pressure, 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.
- Injecting xylazine may also increase risk of **skin ulcers**.



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 .

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.

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 .

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