OVERDOSE RESPONSE CENTER

Delaware Partner Information Bulletin

#2023-02

XYLAZINE

Updated

What is Xylazine or "Tranq Dope"

- Xylazine is an alpha-2 adrenergic agonist (opposes the effects of the sympathetic nervous system, decreasing smooth muscle contractions).
- When cut into opioids, it is known by the street name "Tranq Dope."
- It is approved for veterinary use only, and typically for sedation of large animals. Its effects can last 6-8 hours in humans.
- Bordering states have reported increases in xylazine in their illicit drug supply and an increase in deaths attributed to xylazine.

Risks Associated with Xylazine

- Combined with opioids, xylazine increases the risk of overdose.
- The onset of profound sedation is rapid and compounds the sedative effects of fentanyl.
- Xylazine use may also lead to low blood pressure, slower heart rate and breathing, sores, serious skin infections, and unconsciousness that leads to other injuries.
- Chronic xylazine use can lead to physiologic dependence and a withdrawal syndrome, marked by irritability, anxiety, and dysphoria.

Treatment Provider Awareness

- In Delaware, xylazine is a Schedule III controlled substance, but xylazine testing strips are exempt under the drug paraphernalia definition. Liability protection for the distribution of test strips are spelled out under 16 Del. C. § 2226. https://delcode.delaware.gov/title16/c022/index.html.
- Studies show that naloxone should be administered, even during the sedative effects of xylazine. Emphasize with staff and clients the importance of using naloxone in all suspected overdoses. Knowing that sedative effects will linger, even with restored normal breathing, will help avoid incorrectly attributing this response to "naloxone resistant fentanyl" or "naloxone resistant opioids."
- Educate and discuss with clients appropriate wound care and encourage harm reduction techniques:
  - Do not use alone. Notify or have other people around to help in the event of accidental overdose
  - Carry and use naloxone on friends/family members to treat an overdose
  - Use sterile syringes and clean the skin to prevent infections
  - Use fentanyl and xylazine testing strips prior to use

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DIVISION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Contact: OpioidResponseCenter@delaware.gov

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Signature: Brent Waninger, ORC Director

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Xylazine Related Wounds & Early Care

- Repeated xylazine use may appear in clients as severe, necrotic skin ulcerations or abscesses. This can occur regardless of administration route (smoking, snorting, or injecting) or the administration location.
- Providers should urge individuals to seek urgent medical attention if they exhibit extreme pain, fever or chills, if wounds turn black, if there is a foul odor, or if they experience bone and/or tissue tenderness or damage.
- Early and consistent wound care is important for xylazine related wounds due to the potential severity of necrosis and how quickly they can spread and worsen. The earlier these wounds are managed the better.
- Follow principles of infection control and basic wound care, such as washing hands and using gloves, using gentle cleaning techniques, and keeping wounds covered with a clean dressing.
- It is also important to use a nonjudgmental approach and reduce stigma, as some individuals may not want to seek help for their wounds. Wounds can be treated regardless of one's substance use.
- The state is currently collecting available wound care resources and clinic information to disseminate to the provider network.
- For xylazine withdrawal, the following approaches are being used in other jurisdictions:
  - Replacement therapy with alpha-2-adrenergic agonists (such as Clonidine, Dexmedetomidine, Tizanidine, and Guanfacine).
  - Symptom management for pain (short acting opioids, Ketamine, Gabapentin, Ketorolac, Acetaminophen, NSAIDs); for insomnia (Trazadone, Quetiapine, and Mirtazapine); and anxiety (Hydroxyzine and Benzodiazepines).
  - Treat opioid use disorder and opioid withdrawal. If on opioid agonist therapy, split dosing can increase analgesic effect and improve pain control. If undergoing induction, micro dosing buprenorphine allows for concurrent use of short acting opioids that can improve pain control.

Sources

- Homeless and Housing Resource Center, *Xylazine Basics: Overdose Prevention, Harm Reduction, and Wound Care,* 2023, https://hhrctraining.org/knowledge-resources.
- Philadelphia Department of Public Health, *Health Commissioner's Office, Health Update Xylazine (tranq) exposure among people who use substances in Philadelphia* [Message #: PDPH-HAN-00417U-12-08-2022], December 8 2022, hip.phila.gov/document/3154/PDPH-HAN_Update_13_Xylazine_12.08.2022.pdf/
- Penn Medicine Center for Addiction Medicine and Policy, *Best Practices for Management of Xylazine Withdrawal and Xylazine-related Overdose,* May 2023, https://penncamp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CAMP-Xylazine-Best-Practices-1.pdf.
- Before it's too late, *Xylazine "tranq" is in Maryland,* April 2023, https://beforeitstoolate.maryland.gov/xylazine/.

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