



# DRUG BRIEF

## Xylazine: A Horse Tranquilizer Used to Cut Other Drugs

### Background



Xylazine is a sedative, analgesic, and muscle relaxant. It was designed for and has been exclusively approved by the FDA as a veterinary medicine used to sedate animals. The FDA has not approved this drug for human use so the DEA has not been scheduled as a controlled dangerous substance. When used in veterinary clinics, it comes in a liquid form and is generally used before surgery. The drug is also available in powder and crystalline form which allows it to be pressed into pills.

Why should drug prevention, treatment, and enforcement professionals be concerned about a horse tranquilizer? Unfortunately, drug distributors have begun using Xylazine as a cheap “cutter” for counterfeit opioids, fentanyl, and heroin. The purpose of cutting these drugs is to increase the strength, maintain a very potent product, and, thus, increase profit margins. Mixing Xylazine with other drugs also allows for a more rapid onset of effects and prolongs the high of the companion drugs to last 8 hours or longer.

Many people refer to Xylazine as "tranq," "tranq dope," and "zombie drug." Other street names are Collateral Damage, Cardi B, 550 Rampage, Black Mask, Trashcan, and Steph Curry. When mixed with heroin and cocaine, the cocktail is referred to as a speedball.

Xylazine cannot be detected by routine toxicology screens. Specialized testing is uneven across the country.

### Adverse Effects

To be clear, Xylazine is unsafe for human consumption. Some adverse effects that have been observed in individuals are blurred vision, constriction of the pupils, disorientation, drowsiness, staggering, respiratory depression, slowed heart rate, hypotension, hyperglycemia, flesh-rotting sores, and coma. Similar to the trend of cutting opioids, heroin or other drugs with fentanyl, some drug seekers are not aware Xylazine is present. This increases the risk of overdoses with some of those overdoses ultimately leading to fatalities.

An even more dangerous attribute of Xylazine is that it reduces the effectiveness of naloxone, and in some cases, there will not be a reversal of the overdose. This is because Xylazine is not an opioid so administration of naloxone does not effect it. However, naloxone should still be administered for any suspected opioid overdose because it will impact the heroin, fentanyl or other opioids that may be present.



### A National Threat

In October 2022, the federal DEA issued a "widespread threat," indicating that Xylazine may have potentially lethal consequences in 48 out of 50 states where it has been identified. Further, the DEA identified Xylazine in exhibits in all four U.S. census regions. From 2020 to 2021, the number of Xylazine-positive overdose deaths increased by 1,127% in the South, 750% in the West, 516% in the Mid-west, and 103% in the North.

Following the release of the landmark Xylazine report by the DEA, in November 2022, the FDA alerted healthcare professionals of risks to patients exposed to Xylazine in illicit drugs. In March 2023, the DEA followed

up by issuing a public health alert on Xylazine-laced fentanyl. A week later, a bipartisan group of Congressional lawmakers introduced the *Combating Illicit Xylazine Act*, which would classify it as a Schedule III substance.

In April 2023, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy officially designated fentanyl adulterated with Xylazine as an emerging threat to the United States. This announcement included introduction of an interagency working group to inform the national response plan. The plan includes work on improving and standardizing Xylazine testing, developing treatment and supportive care protocols, developing a comprehensive data systems to include information on drug sourcing and supply, implementation of strategies to reduce illicit supply of Xylazine, and rapid research to better understand Xylazine's interactions between it and other substances.

### Efforts to Control

Due to the huge spikes in overdoses, states are not waiting for federal action to schedule Xylazine. As of April 2023, at least 5 states have placed Xylazine in their controlled dangerous substances schedule, either through legislation or Executive Order. Another handful are currently considering to schedule Xylazine. In Louisiana, HB 106 was filed for the 2023 Regular Legislative Session. This bill would put Xylazine in Schedule II of Louisiana's Controlled Dangerous Substances Law.

State-level actions have triggered concerns by veterinarians who worry about losing access to a go-to sedative for their patients. Individuals and professional groups alike are advocating for laws that balance veterinary access with the need to crack down on illicit use. Drug prevention advocates are being urged to coordinate efforts with state veterinary associations to discuss how these balances can be integrated into legislative actions.

### Photos of adverse effects of Xylazine use

