

# What is xylazine?

Xylazine, also commonly known as “tranq” or “tranq dope,” is an antihypertensive that is used in veterinary medicine as a sedative and pain reliever. Since the early 2000s, it has been found in increasing amounts in the street drug supply. It is often in combination with fentanyl and other synthetic opioids as it gives these drugs “legs,” or increases the length of fentanyl’s effects. Xylazine has not been approved for human use, and there are reported health effects with its use. It is important to know the facts about xylazine in order to prevent any adverse health outcomes.

## Facts

Xylazine was developed in the 1960s and investigated for use in human clinical trials as a painkiller, sedative, and sleep aid. However, due to adverse effects observed in the clinical trials, it was never approved for safe use in humans.

It is approved as a sedative and pain reliever in veterinary medicine, particularly in livestock and horses. Some of the xylazine in the street drug supply is diverted from veterinary pharmacies, while some of the supply is produced in labs.

Xylazine was first discovered in the street drug supply in Puerto Rico in the early 2000s, and was first identified in the continental U.S. in Philadelphia around 2010. It has now been detected in states throughout the country, including in Louisiana.

## Effects

The acute effects of xylazine use include extreme sedation, low blood pressure, slow heart rate, and weak or absent reflexes.

Depending on the dose a person uses and their physical health, xylazine might put people at higher risk for developing blood clots, pressure ulcers, compartment syndrome, and/or rhabdomyolysis.

People who are under xylazine sedation, particularly people who are unhoused, are also at higher risk for theft and physical or sexual assault. If you see someone who appears to be sedated, stay with them and get them help.

Long-term effects of xylazine use include anemia, irregular blood sugar, and wound formation.

# Wound care

- Xylazine-related wounds are of particular concern. The drug may overly constrict blood vessels and nerves, restricting blood flow to areas where there is a break in the skin, leading to tissue and nerve death.
- Xylazine wounds are more commonly seen in people who inject drugs since the wounds are associated with breaks in the skin.
- Wounds might start as small red-purple blisters, and if they develop further, may range in size from small, open sores to large ulcers. Secondary bacterial infections are a major concern. If not treated, these wounds could lead to bone infection, gangrene, limb loss, or, in extreme cases, death.
- If you or anyone you know have wounds, seek medical attention as soon as possible. Though they may seem scary, xylazine wounds do respond to proper treatment.
- Alternative modes of drug administration (e.g., snorting, smoking, rectal administration or “boofing”) may not prevent xylazine wound formation.

# Overdoses

- Xylazine is most frequently found in combination with fentanyl.
- Since xylazine is not an opioid, naloxone will not reverse its effects. However, naloxone will still reverse the effects of fentanyl and other opioids. If an overdose is suspected, it is important to follow proper overdose reversal protocol and to always use naloxone and administer rescue breathing.
- Since xylazine is a strong sedative, it may appear as though the opioid overdose was not reversed. Xylazine doesn't stop or even slow breathing much, though it does slow heart rate, dull reflexes, and make people drowsy or unconscious. If a person is breathing after naloxone administration but has not woken up, stay with them and call help if they do not improve.
- Naloxone is available for free across Louisiana. For more information on where to find naloxone, please visit: [louisianahealthhub.org/hrdhub](https://louisianahealthhub.org/hrdhub)

# Xylazine test strips

Xylazine test strips are now available on the market from DanceSafe and BTNX. The current version of these test strips has only been validated to use on opioids; if you test drugs other than suspected or known opioids, you will likely get inaccurate results.

These test strips are an important harm reduction tool, as they allow people to know what is in their drug supply and make informed decisions about whether or not to use drugs with xylazine, and what measures to take to protect against any potential adverse effects.