



ALERT

Xylazine Detected in Local Unregulated Drug Supply

Monday, May 1, 2023

Peterborough Public Health is reporting the detection of xylazine in the local opioid drug supply. Xylazine has been detected in local supplies of cocaine, opioids, and crystal meth. Xylazine (also known as 'Tranq') is a potent sedative, anesthetic, muscle relaxant and analgesic for animals. It is not approved for human use. It is appearing in Ontario, and may be 'cut' or mixed into fentanyl, benzodiazepines or other drugs to produce a longer and stronger high. It also may be used as a drug of choice. Intravenous, intramuscular, subcutaneous, oral and inhalation use have been reported.

Xylazine was first identified in the unregulated drug supply in 2000 in Puerto Rico, and later in 2007 in the United States starting in Philadelphia. Many American states have since reported xylazine in the unregulated drug supply, and more recently it has been detected in British Columbia and Ontario. The [Toronto Drug Checking Service](#) reports that 15-20% of fentanyl samples tested from Jan-June 2022 contained xylazine. Local frontline providers report that some people who use drugs are experiencing long blackout periods after opioid use and that they have noticed an increase in health care visits for wound care as well as requests for wound care kits from harm reduction sites. These findings point to the likelihood that xylazine is present in the local unregulated drug supply.

When mixed with other depressants the effects are potentiated and the risk of overdose greatly increases. Chronic xylazine use is likely to lead to wide spread skin abscesses and soft tissue infections that are slow to heal, and there have been reports of necrotic tissue damage that appears to be independent of injection sites. Barriers to accessing health services can contribute to the complexity of wounds because some individuals report attempting to treat wounds themselves, or leaving health services against medical advice due to withdrawal symptoms. Addressing withdrawal symptoms can be extremely challenging in the context of the high potency of unregulated and adulterated opioids.

Clinical Presentation of Xylazine Intoxication

The presence of xylazine in the drug supply complicate the clinical presentation and decisions about opioid overdose management. Xylazine is an agonist of central alpha-2 receptors on the brainstem, and it is closely aligned with clonidine. It may be impossible to distinguish between the presence of benzodiazepines, other depressants, and xylazine based on clinical presentation alone. Clinical findings have been reported to last anywhere from 8-72 hours. Delayed bradycardia and hypotension (1-2 days) have been reported. There is no known antidote to xylazine. Supportive care treatment including the use of clonidine for withdrawal management [has been reported](#) to be successful.

Major clinical findings include:

- Hypotension
- Bradycardia

- Sedation
- Respiratory Depression or Arrest
- Cardiac arrhythmias
- Miosis
- Hyporeflexia
- CNS depression

Actions That Can Improve Outcomes and Save Lives

- Ask clients who use drugs about wounds at every point of care.
- Consider how your practice setting can reduce barriers for people who use drugs. Health care providers are encouraged to have frank, non-judgemental conversations with patients about their current drug use, with a goal of identifying appropriate dosing both to manage pain and withdrawal symptoms while promoting retention in treatment.
- Post Peterborough Public Health’s recent Xylazine Alert in your practice setting (pdf copy attached, print copies are available upon request).
- Reinforce public health Harm Reduction messaging with clients:
 - **Don’t Use Alone.** Fix with a friend, visit the Consumption Treatment Services site at 220 Simcoe Street (open 9:30am-8pm, 7 days/week) or call the National Overdose Response Service at 1-888-688-6677.
 - **Start Low, Go Slow.** Only use a very small amount. Use new equipment every time and never share supplies.
 - **Inject Safely.** Take your time finding veins. Use new equipment every time and never share supplies. Do not touch or lick sterile needles. Do not attempt to sharpen or sterilize used needles. Clean injection sites well.
 - **Use Naloxone and Monitor Breathing.** Naloxone does not work on xylazine, but will help with any opioids that may be present. Monitor breathing regularly. Call 911 if breathing is shallow, erratic, or absent.
- If you encounter xylazine related harms in your practice, report this to Peterborough Public Health using the anonymous [Drug Reporting Tool](#).

More information:

Bowles, J et al. (2021). [Xylazine detected in unregulated opioids and drug administration equipment in Toronto, Canada: clinical and social implications](#). Harm Reduction Journal 18 (104).

Toward the Heart. (2022). [Xylazine: Information sheet for health care providers in British Columbia](#).

For naloxone & harm reduction supplies and supports contact:

PARN... 705-749-9110

FourCAST... 705-876-1292

360 Clinic... 705-874-3900

Canadian Mental Health Association... 705-748-6711

One Roof Community Centre... 705-874-1812

MSORT (Mobile Support Overdose Resource Team)...705-760-0673