



County of Santa Cruz



HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To:	Santa Cruz County Healthcare Providers
From:	Lisa B. Hernandez, MD, MPH, County Health Officer
Subject:	Increase in Xylazine Found in Santa Cruz County
Date:	August 15, 2024

Situational Update:

The number of individuals testing positive for Xylazine continues to increase in Santa Cruz County. This local rise is consistent with national trends. Xylazine is increasingly present in the US illegal drug supply and there has been an alarming rise in the recent number of xylazine-positive overdose deaths across the country. Xylazine-positive deaths have also been observed locally in Santa Cruz County.

Xylazine is a powerful sedative intended for animal use only. Over the past few years, the substance has reached the US illegal drug supply, where it is commonly known as “tranq.” Xylazine is an alpha-2 adrenergic receptor agonist similar to clonidine, and it can be swallowed, inhaled, smoked, snorted, or injected (intravenously or intramuscularly). Some individuals who use drugs intentionally take xylazine, especially in combination with other drugs like fentanyl (this combination is commonly known as “tranq-dope”). However, many people who use drugs are not aware that their drug supply contains xylazine. The presence of xylazine increases the risk of accidental overdose, acting as a potent depressant on the cardiorespiratory system.

Xylazine is not safe for human use in any form. Effects in humans include central nervous system depression, respiratory depression, hypotension, bradycardia, and cardiac conduction disturbances. This commonly presents as drowsiness and lethargy and can potentially lead to death. Xylazine can also cause serious skin wounds including ulcers, infections, and abscesses due to cutaneous vasoconstrictive effects that impair skin perfusion and healing. While necrotic skin manifestations are most common at injection sites, they can occur with any method of xylazine use.

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- **Administer Naloxone for Suspected Overdose** – Naloxone should still be administered in ALL cases of suspected overdose

- Although it will not reverse the effects of xylazine, naloxone will reverse any concurrent opioid effects (xylazine is typically combined with opioids)
- Consider xylazine as a potential cause if individuals presenting with overdose do not respond to naloxone. Continue to administer additional doses of Naloxone, activate the emergency response, and provide respiratory support if the person does not fully respond to an initial dose of Naloxone
- **Acute Clinical Management** – Treat with supportive care, including fluids and rescue breathing
 - Respiratory depression may require oxygen and ventilatory support
 - Hypotension may require vasopressor support
 - Test for the presence of xylazine as clinically indicated
- **Wound Care** – Clinicians should recognize the appearance of xylazine-related wounds [\[1\],\[2\],\[3\]](#) and initiate early treatment to prevent downstream complications such as unnecessary amputation
 - Consider xylazine exposure in patients who present with severe or multiple skin ulcerations
 - Clean wounds with soap and water and keep the wound bed moist. Avoid the use of alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, and other drying agents
 - Administer antibiotics ONLY if signs of infection are present (redness, warmth, swelling)
 - Provide gloves and hand sanitizer for those unable to regularly access hand washing, as well as individual saline, gauze, wraps and ointment
- **Resources for Substance Use** – Provide resources as appropriate for individuals using substances
 - [Health Services Agency Syringe Services Program](#)
 - [Substance Use Disorders Services \(santacruzhealth.org\)](#)
 - [Homeless Persons Health Project \(santacruzhealth.org\)](#)
 - [List of Naloxone Distribution Sites Santa Cruz County](#)
 - Never Use Alone hotline: 800-484-3731 (English), 800-928-5330 (Spanish)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Xylazine Information Home:
[Xylazine \(ca.gov\)](#)

CDPH Health Advisory “Xylazine in Illicit Fentanyl in the United States” (2023):
[Xylazine in Illicit Fentanyl in the United States \(ca.gov\)](#)

Santa Cruz County Healthcare Provider Xylazine Handout:
[healthcare provider xylazine handout.pdf - Google Drive](#)

SafeRX Santa Cruz County “What to Know About Xylazine (Tranq)”:
[Resources about Xylazine | hipscc](#)

US Drug Enforcement Administration “The Growing Threat of Xylazine and its Mixture with Illicit Drugs” (2022): [The Growing Threat of Xylazine and its Mixture with Illicit Drugs \(dea.gov\)](#)

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.