Xylazine

What is xylazine?

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is warning the public about a troubling increase in the use of xylazine in combination with fentanyl. This combination can cause both overdoses and wounds that may need care in a hospital.

Xylazine (also known as "Tranq") is a sedative that vets use when treating horses and cows. Xylazine causes a decrease of oxygen and blood flow in the skin. With less oxygen and blood, wounds have trouble healing which may result in infection. Eventually, xylazine use can result in necrotic (or rotting) wounds. Xylazine is not an opioid which means that naloxone does not reverse its effects.

In Minnesota, drug overdoses involving xylazine have increased. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, unintentional overdose deaths involving xylazine have increased each year since 2019. Xylazine overdose deaths in 2021 (24 deaths) were three times greater than in 2020 (8 deaths).

Xylazine & fentanyl

People use often use xylazine with fentanyl to make the effect of fentanyl stronger and longer. However, the risk of an overdose and death is extremely high with this drug combination. While naloxone may reverse a fentanyl overdose, it may not have an effect when fentanyl is used with xylazine.

A deadly duo

This presentation reviews the history of fentanyl and xylazine in the United States drug supply, compares the pharmacology of fentanyl and xylazine, and describes

how fentanyl and xylazine can cause toxicity and overdose, separately and together. Viewers will review the pharmacology of naloxone and its utility in reversing opioid overdose. Viewers will also be able to describe harm reduction strategies to reduce overdose and other harm resulting from fentanyl and xylazine use. Description from Great Lakes ROTA-RC.

Get the presentation slides

For more information and resources related to xylazine, fentanyl, and harm reduction, download the "Xylazine and Fentanyl" Toolkit.

Sources

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