Xylazine

THE NEW THREAT IN THE WAR ON OPIOIDS

Other Names For The Drug

- Tranq (most popular in our area)
- Zombie Drug
- Sleep Cut
- Philly Dope

What Is It?

- Xylazine is a tranquilizer, pain reliever, and central nervous system depressant that is U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved for use in veterinary medicine. It has not been approved for human use. Illicit xylazine is often mixed in with illicit opioids, most frequently fentanyl, but it is not an opioid. Xylazine is also known as "tranq" or, when combined with fentanyl or other opioids, "tranq dope." Xylazine can be used by injecting, snorting, swallowing, or inhaling.

Per the NIH

What Are The Effects?

- Xylazine can make people drowsy and cause breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure to slow to dangerously low levels. When people take xylazine with fentanyl, it is not clear if xylazine increases the risk of fatal overdose. However, extreme sedation from xylazine can cause people to stop breathing. Most overdose deaths linked to both xylazine and fentanyl also involved other substances, including cocaine, heroin, benzodiazepines, alcohol, gabapentin, and prescription opioid medications.

Per the NIH

In Simple Terms, What Does It Do?

- Users report opioid type effects that rival fentanyl use

What Are The Physiological Effects?

- Xylazine is a central nervous system depressant. This means that it makes people drowsy, slows brain activity, relaxes muscles, and slows heart rate and breathing. At certain doses, xylazine's effects can be life threatening, especially if it is used with other depressants such as opioids (including fentanyl), alcohol, and benzodiazepines.

Long Term Damage To The User

- People who have used xylazine also report other effects. Repeated xylazine use can cause painful and difficult-to-treat skin and muscle ("soft tissue") sores. If left untreated, the sores can grow and become infected and lead to patches of dead and dying tissue. In rare severe cases, these may require the affected body part to be amputated. People with these wounds may require ongoing wound management and pain treatment. The sores can appear at the site of injection. But they often appear elsewhere on the body, and some clinicians report that these wounds happen even when people smoke or snort xylazine but do not inject it.

WARNING:
Some Images
May Be Graphic

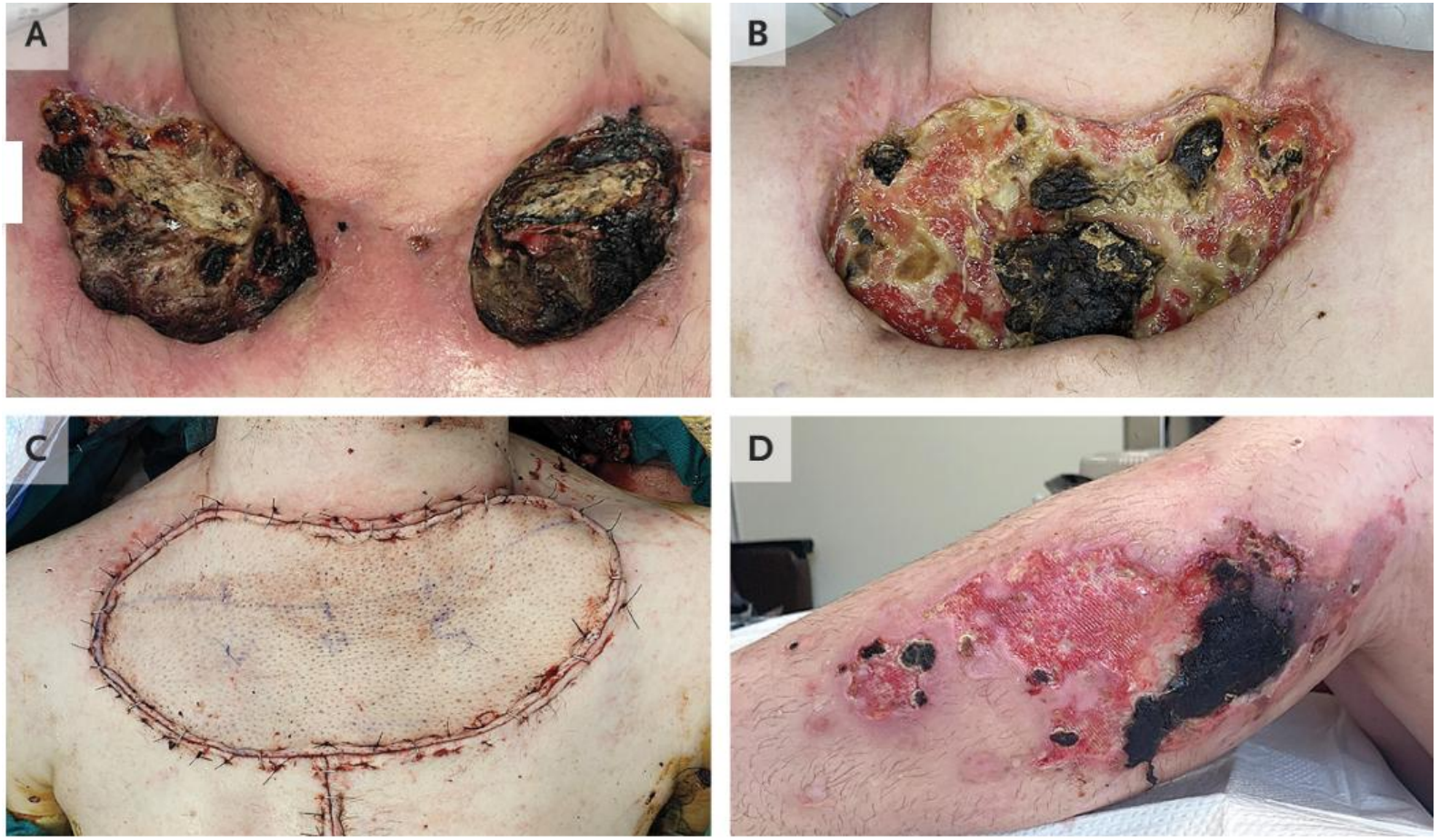
Can Cause Necrosis of Soft Tissue and Bones (Following examples sourced from the Journal of Hand Surgery)

Stage 1 wounds (mild) are characterized as superficial with only partial to full-thickness tissue defect, but without any exposed tendon and muscle, and normal hand function.

Stage 2 wounds (moderate) are characterized as full-thickness skin loss with exposed and compromised muscle and tendon, but preserved hand function.

Stage 3 wounds (severe) are characterized by severe muscle necrosis with exposed bone and potentially associated osteomyelitis and/or possible pathological fracture. This stage is subdivided further, with Stage 3A representing preserved hand function and Stage 3B representing lack of hand function.

A 32-year-old man presented with a 1-month history of enlarging chest wounds. He reported a history of daily injection of fentanyl adulterated with xylazine into his neck and arm veins. (New England Journal of Medicine)



Treating An Overdose

- Currently there is no good options for treating Xylazine overdoses in the field
- Opioid reversal medications, such as Naloxone, do not work on Xylazine
- It is recommended to still administer Narcan, or comparable medications if possible, due to Xylazine is often mixed with fentanyl and other opiods
- Put the patient in the recovery position (on the side, support the head) and monitor breathing
- Call 911 immediately

Fatal Overdose Statistics In TN Involving Xylazine

- 2019 – 23 (TN Dept of Health)
- 2020 – 58 (TN Dept of Health)
- 2021 – 97 (TN Dept of Health)
- 2022 – 192 (TN Dept of Health)
- 2023 statistics have not been released yet

What Is The Appeal For The User

- Xylazine is very cheap and easily accessible
- Street prices right now are around $20 per kilogram (2.2 pounds)
- Street prices for fentanyl is around $35,000.00 per kilogram
- Street price for heroin is around $35,000.00 per kilogram
- Xylazine is not detectable in current mass market drug tests

How Is It Ingested

- Xylazine is available in liquid and powder form
- Currently no manufactures produce it in a pill form
- The liquid is injected
- The powder can be snorted, smoked, or melted down and injected
- Often times the powder form is seen on the street level due to being mixed with other opiods

Legal Status

- Currently Xylazine is available by veterinary prescription
- It currently is not used or approved for human use
- It is not a federally controlled substance
- In 2023, Tennessee recognized the dangers of Xylazine and made it illegal to possess, distribute, transport or manufacture, unless it is for legitimate veterinary reasons (TCA 39-17-456)