

What is xylazine?

Xylazine is used for large animals as an anesthetic and muscle relaxant. It is approved for vet use in Canada under the following names: Rompun®, Nerfasin 100®, Chanazine 100mg Injection®, Xylamax HCl Injection®, and generic xylazine hydrochloride. It is not approved for human use because of severe side effects on blood pressure, pulse, and breathing.

It is not an opioid but may be used to add bulk and enhance the effects of drugs. In BC, it is usually found mixed with fentanyl, but can be mixed with other drugs too. Some people may not know that their drugs are cut with xylazine, while others may choose to take it.

What does xylazine look like?

In its original form, xylazine is a colorless liquid. Xylazine does not have a consistent appearance when added to drugs. It can appear as white or brown powder, brown granules, and grey pebbles.

How often is xylazine detected in BC?

Most drug checking sites do not have the equipment needed to detect xylazine in low amounts, so small amounts of xylazine may get missed. Based on recent data from BC drug checking sites, xylazine may only be in less than 2% of opioids in BC.

What can happen if someone uses xylazine?

Xylazine sickness can feel and look the same as an opioid overdose. Blood pressure, pulse, and breathing can go dangerously low. People can feel dizzy, they can “black out” for hours, and their breathing can slow down or stop. This can sometimes lead to a coma and death.

People who have been taking xylazine for a while can also develop abscesses and skin infections.

How much xylazine can make you sick?

It is not clear. Sometimes symptoms can appear after using a very small amount, but usually they only appear if xylazine has been used regularly for a long time. Xylazine can cause side effects when it is injected, ingested, inhaled or snorted, and after accidental exposure (e.g., splash in the eyes). It can take around 30 minutes after injecting xylazine before side effects appear, but delayed side effects have been reported up to 2 days later.

What should I do if I think someone is having side effects from xylazine?

Always give naloxone. Naloxone will reverse the effects of opioids when an overdose occurs

If there are severe symptoms, then the person needs emergency medical care at a hospital. If you have to leave them alone, place the person in the recovery position (on their side) to avoid choking. Naloxone can sometimes make people vomit if a lot is given.

If there are skin infections or abscesses, then the person should see a healthcare provider for regular wound care. Antibiotics may be prescribed. If wounds are not healing, the person may be using drugs cut with xylazine.

Although policy changes are needed to fix the unregulated drug poisoning crisis, there are actions people can take to lower drug-related risks. The person may want to use: (1) a different drug supply, (2) the **Lifeguard App**, and (3) a drug checking service (**Toward the Heart** lists locations across BC and **GetYourDrugsTested.com** offers testing by mail).

If they are ready, encourage the person to talk to their healthcare provider about prescription alternatives and treatment options.

References

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