



Health Alert:

Xylazine Identified in Overdose Decedents

February 16, 2023

Situation: SFDPH has become aware of four overdose decedents whose toxicology tested positive for xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer, between December 1, 2022, and January 15, 2023. Xylazine has been found in the drug supplies in eastern regions of the U.S. for years, but this is the first time the drug has been identified in decedents in San Francisco. All cases also involved fentanyl.

Xylazine is an alpha-2 adrenergic agonist that is not FDA-approved for use in humans. It is believed to be added to street opioids to heighten and/or prolong effects, particularly for fentanyl which has a very short duration of action. Xylazine causes profound sedation without the degree of respiratory depression caused by opioids. Xylazine is not an opioid so its effects are not reversed by naloxone. However, naloxone should still be administered during a suspected or known xylazine overdose because of the high likelihood that fentanyl is also present. Naloxone will successfully reverse the effects of fentanyl and restore breathing. The person, however, may still be somnolent or minimally responsive because of the ongoing effects of xylazine, which will gradually wear off. People who are trained in naloxone should be reminded that the goal of an overdose reversal is to restore breathing, not to necessarily restore full consciousness.

Chronic xylazine exposure can lead to physiologic dependence and withdrawal symptoms, which include irritability and anxiety. Repeated xylazine injection has also been associated with severe, necrotic skin lesions often requiring advanced wound care. These wounds may occur in areas of the body away from the injection site.

To date in San Francisco there have been no recent reports of increased severity of wounds or syndromes consistent with xylazine intoxication or withdrawal. While this suggests the drug may not yet be prevalent in the local drug supply, SFDPH is working to understand the extent of xylazine in the city and respond accordingly.

Actions requested of San Francisco clinicians:

1. **Inform SFDPH** of atypical or severe skin wounds or atypical clinical syndromes among people who use drugs. Email the SFDPH Office of Overdose Prevention at overdoseprevention@sfdph.org or call (415) 255-3455 during business hours.



2. **Educate patients** that naloxone should be given for any suspected drug overdose, even if there is uncertainty about what drug(s) were used. Naloxone may not fully immediately restore consciousness but is critical to restoring breathing.

3. **Advise patients** who use drugs to:

A. Take steps to reduce risk, including avoiding use of drugs. If intending to continue using drugs, use small “tester” doses, avoid using alone, stagger drug use with others, avoid mixing drugs, and carry naloxone.

B. Advise patients that medications and other forms of treatment are available through treatment programs, primary care services, and other health providers.

Resources:

Naloxone:

- Any individual can get naloxone from the CBHS Pharmacy at 1380 Howard Street, 9:30am – 4pm weekdays (walk-in; no prescription required).
- People who use syringe access services can access naloxone from those sites.
- Organizations seeking naloxone and training can contact the DPH Naloxone Clearinghouse Project at DPH-Naloxone_Clearinghouse@sfdph.org.

Substance Use Disorder Treatment Programs:

- Treatment Access Program (TAP) for linkages @ 1380 Howard Street; Tel (415) 503-4730
- BAART Market methadone clinic @ 1111 Market Street; Tel (415) 863-3833
- BAART Turk methadone clinic @ 433 Turk; Tel (415) 928-7800
- Bayview Hunters Point Foundation Methadone Maintenance @ 1625 Carroll Street; Tel (415) 822-8200
- DSAAM OTOP (Ward 93) @ 1001 Potrero Avenue, Building 90, Ward 93; Tel (415) 206- 8412
- Fort Help Bryant methadone clinic @ 915 Bryant Street; Tel (415) 777-9953
- Fort Help Mission methadone clinic @ 1101 Capp Street; Tel (415) 821-1427
- Office-Based Buprenorphine Induction Clinic (OBIC) @ 1380 Howard Street; Tel (415) 552-6242
- Westside methadone clinic @ 1301 Pierce Street; Tel (415) 563-8200
- SF AIDS Foundation PROP/PROP for All
 - PROP (contingency management for gay/bisexual men, MSM, trans women): Tel (415) 487-3115
 - PROP 4 All (general contingency management): Tel (415) 487-3124

For more information about these programs, see the [Substance Use Disorder Provider Directory](#).