

March 20, 2023

Public Health Alert – Xylazine

Situation

- There is an increased risk of overdose due to Xylazine and benzodiazepines being added to the unregulated drug supply.
- Data from the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario show that in opioid toxicity deaths:
 - Xylazine was detected in 2 - 4% of deaths between 2021 Q4 and 2022 Q3
 - Benzodiazepines were detected in 63% of deaths in 2021 and 41% of deaths in 2022
- Xylazine is:
 - Not approved for human use
 - Typically used by veterinarians for pain relief, sedation, and muscle relaxation of large animals (referred to as horse tranquilizer)
- Benzodiazepines have been seen in the drug supply for some time in our area, however, NWHU has not received confirmatory reports of Xylazine in the NWHU catchment area.

Issue

- Both Xylazine and benzodiazepine use can lead to symptoms similar to an opioid overdose, and they **DO NOT** respond to naloxone administration.
- Risk of acute toxicity increases with the concurrent use of other depressants such as alcohol and/or opioids.

Prevention and Harm Reduction Opportunities

Messaging for patients:

- Don't use alone. Have someone with you, on the phone, or download and use the [Lifeguard app](#).
- If using with a friend, do not use at the same time. Make sure the other person is OK before you use.
- Carry naloxone and know how to use it – although not effective on xylazine or benzodiazepines, it is effective on opioids.
- Call 911 with a suspected overdose. [The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act](#) provides some legal protection to the person calling.
- Counsel on the range of treatment options for opioid use disorder including opioid agonist treatments.



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

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Resources

- [Government of Canada: The Emergence of Xylazine in Canada](#)
- [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction - Xylazine](#)
- [Toward The Heart - Xylazine](#)

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