

Xylazine detected as an adulterant in the unregulated drug supply in British Columbia

Xylazine is an animal tranquilizer that has sedating, muscle relaxing, and painkilling properties. It is not approved for human use but is commonly used in veterinary medicine.

Xylazine is a depressant, causing relaxation of the central nervous system. In humans, toxic effects of xylazine are severe drops in blood pressure, lowered heart rate, and respiratory suppression.

Xylazine has been detected as an adulterant in drugs in the British Columbia unregulated drug supply. Generally found in opioids such as heroin or fentanyl, xylazine may enhance some desirable effects of these drugs, but the reason for its presence in drugs in British Columbia is still unknown. Xylazine is frequently found as an opioid adulterant in certain American cities, namely Philadelphia and Baltimore, where it is often referred to as *tranq*. It is also commonly sold in Puerto Rico as *anestesia de caballo* or “horse anesthesia” and has been reported as a drug of choice in that setting.

Case reports have shown individuals who have consumed 200 mg or more of xylazine fully recovered after intensive hospital care and as such, its effects when present as a trace component in drugs are largely unknown.

Drug checking with Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy has failed to detect xylazine in drug samples where it was later identified by laboratory testing. Although this likely indicates that the level of xylazine was relatively low, it is not possible to say if that level of xylazine could contribute significantly to overdose.

Sources:

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