

Lawmakers want to tighten access to veterinary drug xylazine, often mixed with fentanyl

March 29 2023, by Cara Murez



Congressional leaders introduced a bill on Tuesday that would further restrict access to the veterinary drug xylazine, which is now being added to fentanyl powder.

Also known as tranq, the [drug](#) is meant to be a sedative and muscle relaxer for horses and other [large animals](#) and is not approved for human use. But the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has [warned](#) that it found xylazine in nearly a quarter of the fentanyl powder it seized in 2022.

In addition to depressing breathing and causing overdoses, xylazine can even cause severe, necrotic skin ulcerations that may lead to amputation.

The [Combating Illicit Xylazine Act](#) would reclassify the substance as a Schedule III drug, while declaring it as an emerging threat and allowing the DEA to track manufacturing of the drug. Other Schedule III drugs include ketamine and anabolic steroids.

"Drug traffickers are going to great lengths to pad their profits with dangerous drugs like tranq, and we need to empower [law enforcement](#) to crack down on its spread in our communities," [Rep. Catherine Cortez Masto](#) said in a [news release](#) announcing the bill she co-sponsored.

"This bipartisan legislation will ensure the DEA and local law enforcement have the tools they need to get xylazine off our streets while protecting its important use as a veterinary tranquilizer," Cortez Masto added.

Among the other symptoms experienced by people taking xylazine are blurred vision, disorientation, drowsiness, staggering, coma, bradycardia ([abnormal heart rhythm](#)), [respiratory depression](#), [low blood pressure](#), constricted pupils and high blood sugar.

"Drug [overdoses](#) remain unacceptably high as cartels and traffickers continue to flood our nation with deadly and ever-changing poison," said [Sen. Chuck Grassley](#), who co-sponsored the bill. "We cannot successfully prevent these tragedies with one hand tied behind our back. We must keep pace with the evolving tactics of the drug trade."

Importantly, the overdose antidote Naloxone (Narcan) doesn't reverse a xylazine overdose. However, experts have said it can still be helpful to treat those who have taken opioids cut with xylazine, *NBC News* reported.

The drug has been discovered in at least 48 states mixed into fentanyl.

"This toxic brew of drugs makes fentanyl, which has taken thousands of lives in California and around the country each year, not just cheaper but deadlier and more addictive," bill co-sponsor [Rep. Jimmy Panetta](#) said. "Although xylazine has legitimate uses in agriculture, we need to prevent it from being misused on the streets."

Exactly where xylazine is coming from isn't clear, according to [Claire Zagorski](#), a chemist, paramedic and translational scientist in Austin, Texas.

"One of the things that makes this really unique and odd is the xylazine we're seeing in the drug supply is being sourced from above ground. It's not being cooked in labs, it's being diverted from veterinary suppliers, and the specific source of that isn't clear," Zagorski told *NBC News*.

The xylazine being found is "purely made," which Zagorski said was "very uncommon for the illicit drug supply, especially at this scale."

More information: The National Institute on Drug Abuse has more on [xylazine](#).

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