

Xylazine in the UK

Guidance for Frontline Practitioners

Identification, Health Harms, and Harm Reduction Response

What is Xylazine?

The Definition

- Veterinary sedative, analgesic, and muscle relaxant
- Licensed for cattle, horses, and non-human mammals
- No approved medical use in humans



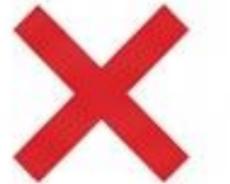
The Classification



Alpha-2 Adrenergic Agonist (e.g., Clonidine)



Opioid (e.g., Heroin/Fentanyl)

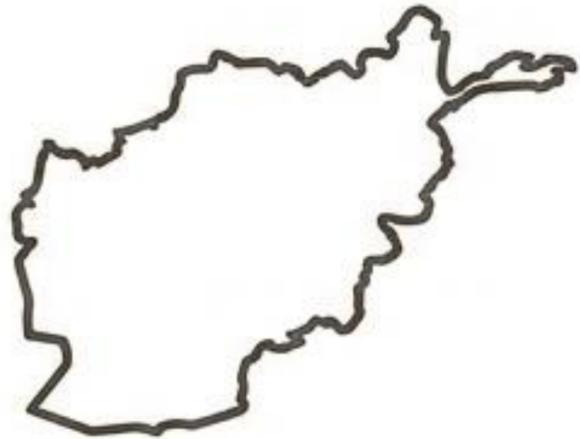


Common Street Names:

'Tranq', 'Tranq Dope', 'FAAX' (Fentanyl Adulterated or Associated with Xylazine)

The UK Supply Chain Context

Taliban Opium Ban
(April 2022)



~95% reduction in poppy cultivation.

Market Shift



Rise of synthetic alternatives (Nitazenes) & bulking agents (Xylazine).

The 'Extender' Effect



Xylazine mimics heroin's long half-life to prolong the 'nod'.

UK Reality: Consumption is largely unknowing. Found in brown powder (heroin), counterfeit codeine/tramadol, and THC vapes.

Legal Status (2025 Update)

CLASS C DRUG

Controlled under **Misuse of Drugs Act 1971** (Effective Jan 2025).

Schedule 4 Part 1 (Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001).

Reason: Preserves legitimate veterinary access.

Possession: Up to 2 years prison / fine.

Supply: Up to 14 years prison / fine.

UK Prevalence & Supply Context

Timeline

- First UK death: Dec 2022 (NPSAD).
- 2022-2023: 35 detections confirmed across England, Scotland, and Wales.

Supply Vectors

- Heroin / Fentanyl supply (Adulterant)
- Counterfeit Tablets (Codeine, Diazepam, Tramadol)
- THC Vapes

RISK: Unintended Consumption. Users are often unaware Xylazine is present in their substance.



Pharmacology & Acute Clinical Effects

The Synergistic Danger: Opioids + Xylazine

• Opioid Effects

-  Respiratory Depression
-  Euphoria
-  Pinpoint Pupils

**Potentiated
CNS Depression**

• Xylazine Effects

-  Profound Sedation (up to 8 hours)
-  Severe Hypotension (Low BP)
-  Bradycardia (Slow Heart Rate)
-  Dry Mouth

Critical Distinction: Xylazine sedation is heavier and longer-lasting than opioids alone. **It does not respond** to Naloxone, but the accompanying opioid does.

The Toxic Cocktail: Xylazine + Nitazenes



[Nitazenes]

- Potent Opioid
- 100x Morphine
- Rapid Arrest

+



[Xylazine]

- Sedative Extender
- Naloxone Resistant
- Prolonged Coma

=



[High Risk Profile]

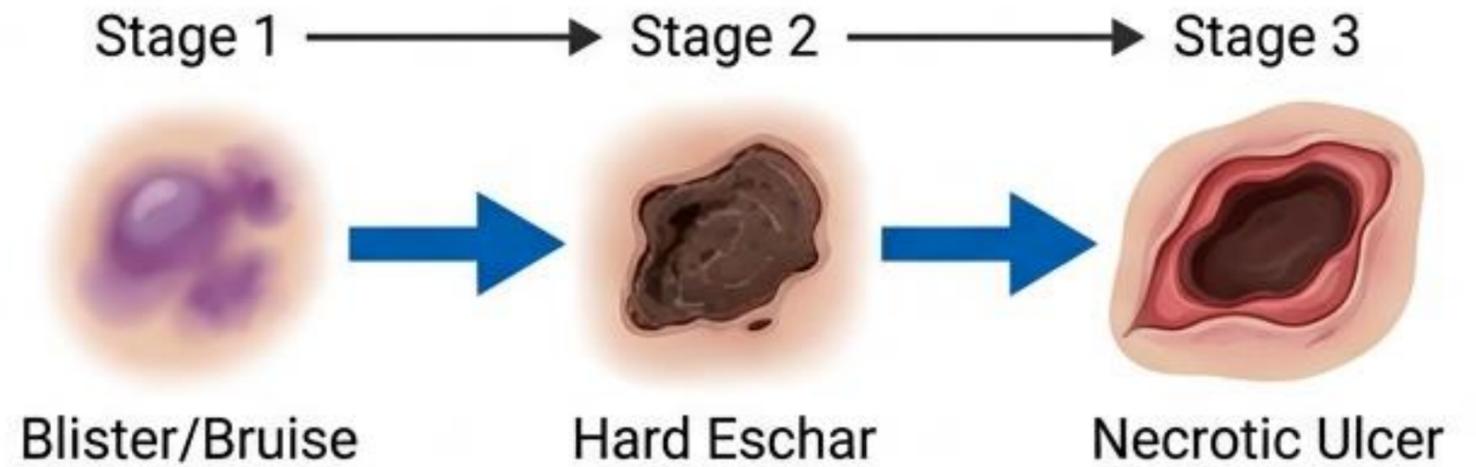
- Difficult to reverse, requires airway management + multiple naloxone doses

Action: Assume any 'heroin' overdose could be a synthetic mixture.

Understanding Xylazine Wounds (XAWs)

Mechanism: Severe Vasoconstriction.

Xylazine narrows blood vessels, reducing skin perfusion (oxygen supply). This causes tissue death **from the inside out**.



Key Characteristics

- Can appear anywhere (not just injection sites).
- Independent of route (can happen from smoking/snorting).
- Often misinterpreted as abscesses.

Frontline Wound Care Basics

DO



- Encourage early medical review.



- Clean gently with soap and water.



- Cover with non-adherent dressings (keep moist).

DO NOT



- DO NOT inject into or near the wound.



- DO NOT use alcohol or hydrogen peroxide (damages healing tissue).



- DO NOT aggressively debride (remove scab) unless infection is clear.

Overdose Response Protocol



1. Administer Naloxone

Reverse the opioid component to restore breathing.



2. Airway Management

If breathing but sedated, place in recovery position. Keep airway clear.



3. Call 999

Medical emergency requiring oxygen and blood pressure support.



4. Monitor

Sedation persists for hours. Risk of aspiration/positional asphyxia.

Client-Facing Harm Reduction



**Start Low,
Go Slow**
Test new
batches.



Don't Use Alone
Spotting is
critical due to
rapid sedation.



Mind the Position
Avoid **slumping**
that cuts
circulation or
airway.



Maintenance
Hydrate for dry
mouth.
Iron-rich foods
for anemia risk.

Summary of Key Actions



Naloxone

Essential for the opioid component. Use it.



Airway

Maintain airway if breathing returns but consciousness does not.



Wounds

Keep clean, covered. No aggressive debridement.



Vigilance

Present in fake meds and vapes, not just heroin.



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