

PA GROUNDHOGS



PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

COUNTY: PHILADELPHIA, ALLEGHENY

DATE(S): APRIL 27-MAY 17 2024

NATURE OF EVENT: MEDETOMIDINE ADULTERATION

ADVERSE EVENTS: YES

As states crack down on Xylazine, a new veterinary tranquilizer is already taking its place.

MEDETOMIDINE, a veterinary tranquilizer reported to be magnitudes stronger than xylazine, infiltrated Pennsylvania's illicit opioid supply at the end of April, and in a matter of weeks has made its way to Chicago, where it's suspected of causing a wave of "overdoses" last weekend.

The recent outbreak of MEDETOMIDINE began with a spike in adverse drug reactions in Philadelphia that started on or before April 27, 2024 and continues to impact the city's illicit opioid-using population.

Victims exhibit extreme sedation, with unresponsiveness lasting as long as six hours in some cases. Other side effects include bradycardia, hypotension, slowed breathing (sometimes accompanied by pronounced snoring), and in some cases hallucinations.

"He went down like he'd been hit with a tranquilizer dart about 15 minutes after snorting it," said one witness, whose friend did one of the tainted bags. "He laid there on his stomach and didn't move for four hours. I had narcan but he was snoring so loud I knew he was breathing."

MEDETOMIDINE is an alpha-2 agonist much like Xylazine. It is used in veterinary medicine to anesthetize dogs and is one of several sedatives used in tranquilizer darts. [According to one study](#), MEDETOMIDINE has 200-fold greater potency at $\alpha 2$ -adrenoceptors over xylazine, and is more selective for $\alpha 2$ -

over α 1-adrenoceptors.

DETAILS

Philadelphia:

Number of exhibits: **Multiple**

On April 27, 2024 public health authorities in the Kensington section reported a multi day surge in nonfatal overdoses. In total nearly 100 people were sickened over the course of three days. Dope samples obtained by The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) and PA Groundhogs (PAG) and tested by the Center for Forensic Science, Research & Education (CFSRE), in Horsham, PA, revealed the presence of the drug MEDETOMIDINE, along with fentanyl and xylazine, in roughly a dozen brands of Philadelphia street dope.

Pittsburgh:

Number of exhibits: **One**

On April 28, the PA Department of Health issued an overdose anomaly alert for the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, reporting 14 suspected “overdoses” in 24 hours. Another 17 suspected adverse drug reactions were reported between May 2-3. It’s unclear how many (if any) of those events may have been related to MEDETOMIDINE, as samples from the scene were not readily available. Harm reduction officials say the reporting system is imperfect and over broad, and they insist there was no anomaly. By May 10, PA Groundhogs had submitted dope samples from Allegheny, Indiana, Cambria and Armstrong Counties to CFSRE for analysis. Results showed one sample received from Indiana County contained MEDETOMIDINE, along with fentanyl, xylazine, and tetracaine. The individual who submitted the sample marked it as being acquired in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Allegheny Commons.

Chicago:

Number of exhibits: **Four**

By early May, MEDETOMIDINE had traveled west causing a spike in suspected overdoses in Chicago. Samples obtained by The Chicago Recovery Alliance (CRA) and sent to CFSRE revealed four out of ten samples tested positive for the sedative, combined with fentanyl, Xylazine, heroin and Diphenhydramine (Benedryl).

ANALYSIS

MEDETOMIDINE was first observed in the U.S. drug supply in July 2022, and has appeared sporadically alongside fentanyl in a handful of states; in January it was identified by Toronto’s drug checking service for the first time. The latest

wave of events coincides with new restrictions on Xylazine and/or the perceived consequences of selling the drug in the U.S.

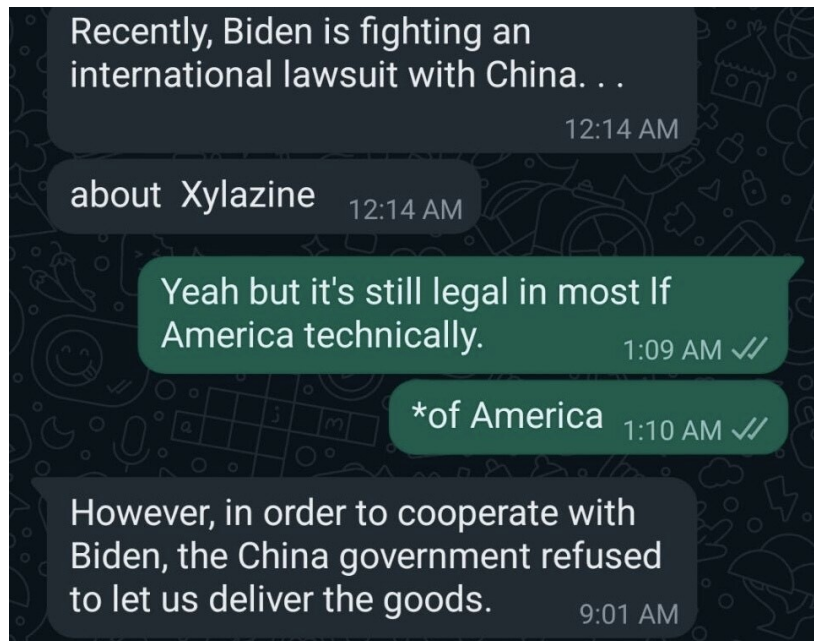
Supply side sources told *Narcomedia* that the cost of Chinese Xylazine has increased substantially as more states pass laws scheduling the veterinary sedative known for causing severe wounds on the skin of people who use it. Some suppliers won't ship to North America at all.

"The price has doubled for Xylazine," said one Philadelphia fentanyl and tranquilizer supplier, who was forced to temporarily eliminate the drug from his cut while he sorted out a new arrangement with his Chinese supplier. "This happens every time when something hits the black list in the states," he said. "They double prices and off their remaining supply then usually shut that item down."

Another source, in Western Pennsylvania, shared the following exchange he had with two Chinese Xylazine suppliers .



And:



As far as I know there is no "international lawsuit" about xylazine. But perceptions matter. The introduction of MEDETOMIDINE in Philadelphia began less than a month before Governor Josh Shapiro signed a law permanently classifying Xylazine a Schedule III drug. Meanwhile wholesale fentanyl prices are at an all time high in the Northeast, the result of a power play within the Sinaloa cartel. placing pressure on retail markets.

"Some corners can't get either [fentanyl or xylazine]," said one Philadelphia supplier, "or else they need to stretch what they do have further."

This confluence of factors has led to more adulteration of the drug supply. The number of dope samples collected by PA Groundhogs with more than two active ingredients has increased just within our short period of operation.

Recent dope samples obtained by PA Groundhogs and analyzed by CFSRE contained the benzodiazepine analogs Bromazolam and Flubromazepam; Tetrahydropalmatine; PCP, nitazenes, and lots of Diphenhydramine. Even heroin is turning up in more samples, sometimes as the dominant drug.

Only time will tell what comes next; and PA Groundhogs will be there to tell you.

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Thanks to the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Chicago Recovery Alliance & the Center for Forensic Science Research & Education for helping make this report possible.

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