

OTOP Emerging Psychoactives Monitoring

Trends in the San Francisco Substance Supply

Study Background

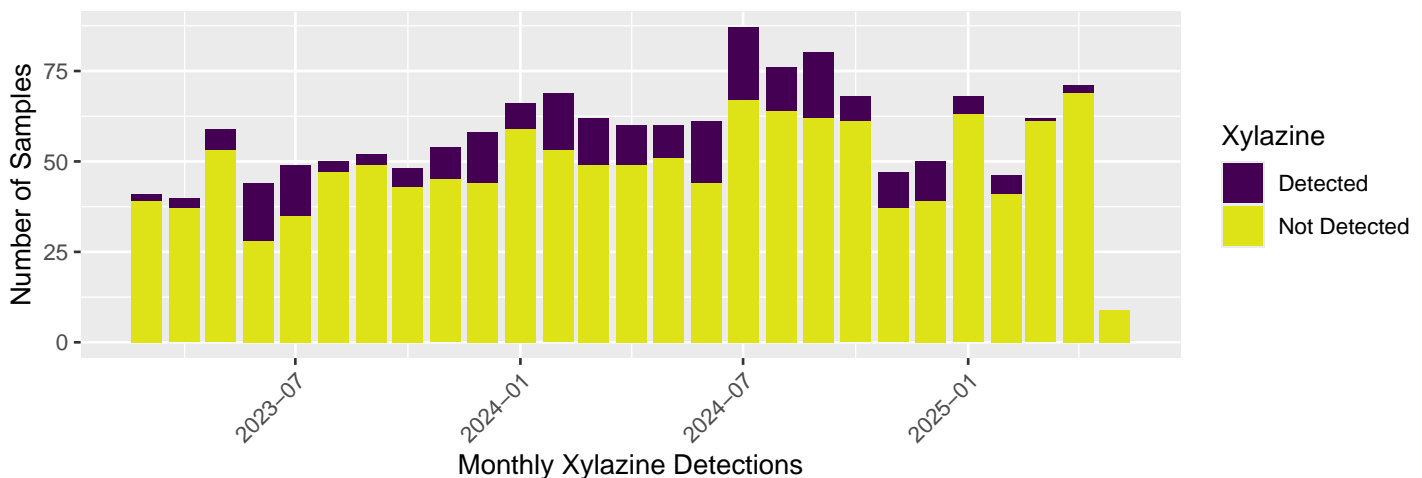
In early 2023, patients at the Opioid Treatment Outpatient Program (OTOP) at San Francisco Zuckerberg General Hospital expressed concern of nitazene (a class of highly potent synthetic opioids) presence in the drug supply and asked OTOP providers for more information. In collaboration with Dr. Kara Lynch's chemistry research group at UCSF at SF General Hospital, surveillance for the emergence of hazardous substances in the drug supply using enhanced urine toxicology was started in March 2023 with IRB approval from UCSF. Per Federal regulations, a urine drug screen is required for all methadone treatment intakes. From each of these urines, less than half a teaspoon (2mL) is aliquoted and de-identified and undergo extensive toxicological analysis. OTOP providers remain blinded to sample identity, with results aggregated by week.

Xylazine

What is Xylazine? Xylazine is a drug used in veterinary medicine to sedate animals. It is not approved for use in humans by the FDA. Xylazine has been increasingly added to the opioid supply in eastern parts of the US like Philadelphia, but until June 2023 it has been rarely detected on the West Coast and in San Francisco. Opioids with xylazine added are sometime called "*tranq dope*", but not everything called "*tranq*" necessarily has xylazine in it.

What should I know about Xylazine? Injecting xylazine has been associated with severe skin wounds, but further research is needed. Xylazine may increase opioid overdose risk due to its strong sedating effect.

Xylazine Detection Aggregated by Month



Is Xylazine in San Francisco? The OTOP surveillance study detected xylazine occasionally when it first started. The number of samples with xylazine detected in them was much higher in June and July 2023, but since then xylazine has again only been occasionally detected. As of 05/07/25, we are seeing an uptick in the number of xylazine positives since mid-October. Everytime xylazine has been detected, so has fentanyl. This suggests xylazine is an adulterant of fentanyl in San Francisco, which matches what we know from the eastern US.