



# County of Santa Cruz

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## HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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## Press Release

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**For Release: Immediately**

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### FIRST XYLAZINE DEATH CONFIRMED IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

*Officials urge steps to reduce overdose, including use of naloxone for suspected overdoses since xylazine is often mixed with opioids*

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, Calif.** – The County of Santa Cruz Medical Examiner-Coroner has confirmed the first death from xylazine poisoning in the county. Xylazine, also known as tranq, is a veterinary tranquilizer with no approved use in humans and is increasingly detected in drug supplies across the country, leading to deadly overdoses and serious wounds.

A 35-year-old woman was found unresponsive in Santa Cruz, died in early June, and later tested positive for drugs including xylazine and fentanyl through postmortem toxicology. Xylazine is added to fentanyl to extend the opioid's euphoric effects, often without users' knowledge.

"This tragic event is an important alert to the community that xylazine is confirmed to be present in drugs in Santa Cruz County," said Dr. David Ghilarducci, County of Santa Cruz EMS Medical Director. "Fentanyl, alone, is extraordinarily dangerous and is devastating communities across the country. The addition of a xylazine compounds the risk of street drugs."

Reports from the federal Drug Enforcement Administration indicate that xylazine is often mixed with opioids like fentanyl and heroin. Although xylazine overdose is not reversed by naloxone, the life-saving medication should still be administered to people experiencing overdose to reverse the opioid component of the overdose. Naloxone would not harm someone under the influence of xylazine.

“The safest approach is to avoid using street drugs if possible. Fortunately, there are effective treatments available for those that are dependent on opioids” says Dr. Ghilarducci.

Xylazine can slow down the nervous system and make breathing and heart rate slower. If someone is unresponsive, call 911, administer naloxone, and perform rescue breathing. If xylazine is present, they may still be very drowsy even after receiving naloxone.

Testing for this drug is not yet available in all emergency room or health care settings. The Public Health Department is alerting local doctors to its increasing prevalence in the drug supply. Xylazine can cause wounds. See a doctor immediately if you have a wound from using xylazine, and keep it clean and covered to avoid infection.

Naloxone has recently been approved by the federal government for over-the-counter distribution at pharmacies and is available for free from many community sites. See <https://www.hipsc.org/naloxone> for a list of naloxone distribution sites. People who are ready to seek treatment for substance use can contact their primary care doctor or phone the Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health Division at (800) 953-2335.

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