



White House Declares Xylazine-Laced Fentanyl “An Emerging Threat”

Jeffrey Singer

April 12, 2023

“First it was heroin. Next, it was fentanyl-laced heroin. Then it was fentanyl. Now it’s xylazine-laced fentanyl. Will nitazenes be next? Will policymakers ever learn that the Iron Law of Prohibition cannot be repealed?”

Today the Biden Administration declared that fentanyl laced with xylazine (“tranq”) is an [“emerging threat.”](#) In February, I [wrote](#) about how the veterinary tranquilizer xylazine is being added to fentanyl to boost its potency, causing more people to die from overdosing. This mixture is more deadly than fentanyl alone because xylazine is not an opioid, and overdoses from it that cause people to stop breathing cannot be reversed with naloxone. Xylazine causes blood vessels to constrict, and if it gets into the tissues surrounding blood vessels, it can lead to tissue necrosis and deadly soft tissue ulcers. Some users’ ulcers have become so severely infected that surgeons must amputate limbs to save their lives.

I explained how tranq’s appearance on the black market is just the latest example of the *Iron Law of Prohibition*: “The harder the law enforcement, the harder the drug.” Enforcing prohibition incentivizes those who market prohibited substances to develop more potent forms that are easier to smuggle in smaller sizes and can be subdivided into more units to sell.

I made the same points when I [testified](#) before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Government Surveillance last month. I urged the Subcommittee members to avoid doubling down on law enforcement and drug interdiction because such interventions only turbocharge the Iron Law, fueling the development of even more potent and deadly drugs and drug combinations. For example, I warned that the synthetic opioid [isotonitazene](#), which users call “iso,” purported to be 20 times the potency of

fentanyl, started [appearing in 2019](#) and is increasingly detected in overdose toxicology studies.

Alas, my warnings have been falling on deaf ears as policymakers continue to propose doubling down on the same policies that have failed since the [second](#) war on drugs began in 1971. Some in Washington call for the [military to invade Mexico](#) to root out the drug cartels. Others seek to pile on penalties for drug possession or sale, from [mandatory minimums](#) to the [death penalty](#).

In declaring tranq a threat, Dr. Rahul Gupta, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, said the administration is considering making the currently unscheduled veterinary drug a Schedule III drug under the Controlled Substances Act. That would be a futile gesture. Fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine are Schedule II drugs; diacetylmorphine (heroin) and cannabis are Schedule I drugs. Scheduling has not deterred the black-market sale of any of those drugs.

Alas, policymakers continue flailing with futile gestures in response to the worsening overdose crisis. Today's lawmakers are either slow learners or refuse to see the evidence. President Nixon declared "war on drugs" 52 years ago. It took only 13 years (1920–1933) for lawmakers to realize that alcohol prohibition only made alcohol consumption more dangerous and deadly while profiting underworld criminals and promoting violent crime.

Jeffrey A. Singer is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and works in the Department of Health Policy Studies.