

Perspectives of Pregnant and Postpartum Persons on Xylazine Education and Home Testing

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INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of pregnant and postpartum people who use drugs (PPWUD) about a Xylazine test strip (XTS) harm reduction intervention.

- Xylazine, an animal tranquilizer, is a common adulterant in the unregulated opioid supply.
- Exposure can cause deep sedation, necrotic wounds and dependence.
- The impacts of Xylazine exposure during pregnancy are largely unknown but of significant concern.
- Xylazine immunoassay test strips (XTS) are a harm reduction strategy that can inform safe use practices but have not been studied in pregnant and postpartum populations.

METHODS

- 50 PPWUD recruited from larger maternity hospital in Western Pennsylvania.
- Received about 10- 15 min standardized education session about Xylazine and XTS, including videos and pamphlets.
- Received 5 XTS kits for at-home use.
- Two months later, participants were asked to participate in a semi-structured qualitative interview (n=34) about their experiences using the strips and associated behavior change.
 - 56% (19/34) Pregnant
 - 38% (13/34) Postpartum
 - 3% (1/34) Miscarriage since enrollment
- Interviews were coded and themes generated by a thematic analysis.

THEMES

Welcomed Learning: Health Care as a Trusted Space for Xylazine and XTS Education

- Some knew about Xylazine, while some were unaware before education.
- Appreciated the standardized education provided.
- Felt comfortable receiving this education in a healthcare environment.
- Desire for more information on Xylazine-related harms, particularly regarding withdrawal and wound care.

Informed Testing Utilization: Ease and Reliability of XTS

- XTS were easy to use.
- Appreciated quick, trustworthy results.
- Felt safer and empowered.
- Some had used the testing strips, but many did not previously know they were available.

Knowledge as Harm Reduction: Valuable Tool with Immediate Impact

- Those with period of abstinence did not use but many shared with others in their community.
- Many changed their use behaviors after positive Xylazine test.
- XTS less effective as Xylazine more prevalent.
- Fear of withdrawal heavily influences decisions about use.

Deep Concerns for Health: Xylazine Impacts on Self, Pregnancy, and Future Generations

- Concerns about Xylazine effects as a motivation to seek treatment
- Many believed Xylazine exposure worsened withdrawal symptoms, reducing treatment effectiveness.
- Frequent concerns about oversedation and wounds.
- Pregnant participants very worried about Xylazine effects on fetal development and infant withdrawal.

PERSPECTIVES

QUOTES

It was definitely something new to me. It was the first time I've ever heard of anything like that. So, finding out that that's what I was exposed to, it kind of gave me some clarity as to why I struggled so much with getting clean this time on my own.

It impacted me in a positive way just because, I get to know a little bit.... I'm more aware of what I'm actually putting into my body versus not really knowing.

It popped up real quick if it was positive for the Xylazine too. I liked it. It was actually pretty cool seeing.

If it comes back positive for it, I would normally just not do as much because I know it's going to make me drowsy.

It actually helped me quit using. Or stay away from it. Because I knew how much worse the sickness was. And knowing that it tested positive for it just kind of helps with those urges ironically.

One is how it affects my body, and my baby, and her brain and how she's growing and about her health and everything. Yeah, it was kind of worrisome whenever I was doing it, obviously, I was very worried about my baby.

XYLAZINE EDUCATION



DISCUSSION

- Participants found the intervention to be acceptable, empowering and beneficial for safer drug use.
- Wider implications to advocate for expanding community drug checking, demonstrating that people want information about what is in their drug supply and use information to mitigate risk.
- Call to action for harm reduction to be more fully integrated into care for pregnant people with substance use disorder.

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