Medetomidine and Dexmedetomidine

Medetomidine (meh-deh-TOH-mih-deen) is a medication used by veterinarians for animal sedation. Like xylazine, medetomidine is not approved for human use. Dexmedetomidine (deks-meh-deh-TOH-mih-deen) is approved for clinical use including sedation and pain relief in animals and humans.

Medetomidine/dexmedetomidine* have been found in the unregulated drug supply in Ontario. They can be “cut” (mixed) into opioids and other drugs that are sold in the unregulated supply.

Be aware, both medetomidine and dexmedetomidine:

- can cause extreme drowsiness and sedation, especially when present with other depressant substances like opioids, benzodiazepines and xylazine;
- are being reported together as medetomidine/dexmedetomidine* because it is not currently possible to differentiate between them (Toronto’s Drug Checking Service);
- can cause slow, irregular, or stopped breathing, and decreases in blood pressure and heart rate;
- are not opioids, so naloxone will not affect them, but naloxone will work on opioids that may also be present. Naloxone should be used in a suspected overdose. If in doubt, follow the The 5 Steps to Respond to an Opioid Overdose.

Individuals who use drugs are reminded:

- Carry naloxone: Naloxone is a medication that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Naloxone kits are available at no cost in Ontario. Please visit StopOverdoseOttawa.ca to find out how to get a naloxone kit.
- Don’t use alone: A buddy system is safer than using alone. If you are using with someone else, don’t use at the exact same time.
- If you do use alone, tell someone before you use: Have a safety plan which includes having someone come check on you. You can also call the National Overdose Prevention Line at 1-888-688-NORS (6677) or connect with an anonymous virtual harm reduction supporter via the Brave App.
- If you choose to use: Consider visiting one of the four Supervised Consumption and Treatment Services locations in Ottawa.
- Get your drugs checked before using: Walk-in drug checking services are available at Sandy Hill Community Health Centre and for registered clients of Ottawa Inner City Health’s Consumption and Treatment Service.
- Don’t mix drugs: Using more than one drug at a time puts you at a higher risk of overdose.
- Know your tolerance: The risk of overdose increases if you are a using for the first time or if you haven’t used in more than three days.
- Go slow: The toxicity of unregulated drugs is unpredictable.

If you have a friend or family member who uses drugs, you are encouraged to:

- Know the signs of an overdose (link is external) and call 9-1-1 immediately if you witness an overdose.
- Carry naloxone (link is external) – a medication that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose.

Visit StopOverdoseOttawa.ca for more information on overdose prevention and harm reduction services.