

# Fact Sheet for Parents About Xanax

Curiosity and risk taking is a normal part of the teen and young adult years. The teenage brain continues to develop throughout the early part of adulthood – especially the areas in charge of impulse control. Teens may find themselves in risky situation where alcohol and/or drugs may be available.

## The issue

KFL&A Public Health has been notified that youth in our area have recently required medical treatment related to an unknown substance that resembled Xanax. Residents are reminded that drugs not received from a pharmacy may contain other substances and increase the risk of adverse events or overdose. Parents are urged to talk to their teens about the dangers of taking street drugs, which can also look like prescription drugs, as well as the dangers of taking prescription drugs not prescribed to them.

## What is Xanax?

Xanax (Alprazolam) is a medication from the benzodiazepine family that functions as a central nervous system depressant. It is commonly used to treat various forms of anxiety and panic disorders, as well as insomnia, by decreasing abnormal excitement in the brain.

## What are the effects and risks?

Xanax, like other prescription tranquilizers, is intended to slow normal brain activity and function, which may result in slowed breathing (respiratory depression), slurred speech, dilated pupils, disorientation, fatigue and decreased coordination. In high dosages, Xanax can, "...cause impaired memory, judgment and coordination; irritability; paranoia; and thoughts of suicide. Some people can become agitated or aggressive."<sup>1</sup>

Repeated use of Xanax can lead to dependence, which can result in withdrawal symptoms when use is reduced or stopped. Talk to a medical professional to develop a safe strategy for reducing use. Tolerance to Xanax can develop quickly, causing an individual to consume higher dosages to achieve the same result, increasing the risk of harming themselves. This includes the potential for overdose, particularly when taken with other depressants such as alcohol, benzodiazepines and/or opioids (i.e., fentanyl, heroin and morphine).

## What are the sources of Xanax?

There is no sure way to confirm how teens are getting Xanax. It appears that access to Xanax, and other prescription medications, are likely from a prescription by physicians and/or psychiatrists (which could include misuse of another person's prescription like a sibling or parent); purchased from a friend or dealer; or purchased from the internet or dark web.

Information from police suggests there are likely two streams of Xanax in circulation: legitimate and illicit versions. A legitimate form of Xanax would include pills obtained through a direct prescription, used by the individual they've been prescribed to, or diverted from another person's prescription. There is also an illicit stream of unregulated Xanax, which is chemically produced to resemble prescribed Xanax and it may be difficult to distinguish a legitimate pill from a fake pill. This however poses significant risk to the person, as the effects of the fake pill may vary from pill to pill, including the dosage, interactions with other drugs, and may contain fentanyl or other opiates which can cause serious and life-threatening conditions.

## Know and minimize the risks:

### 1. Most teens do not use drugs.

Never take anything when you are not 100% sure what it is or where it has come from.

## 2. Do your research.

Know and understand what you are putting into your body. Can the following questions be answered?

- What is the substance?
- How was it made?
- Has it been altered?
- What should the substance do to you?
- What are the side effects of taking the substance?
- What will you do if your experience is not what you expected?
- If it looks, smells, or tastes different, be cautious about using it!

## 3. Prevent an overdose from happening.

The only way to avoid an accidental overdose is not to use drugs. If you choose to use, following these tips will help to reduce the risk of an overdose:

- Never use alone
- Don't mix a drug, with other drugs or alcohol.
- Overdoses can happen to anyone; there is no magic formula to say who will overdose and who will not.
- If you choose to use, make sure help is easily available. Have a naloxone kit available and get trained on how to use it.

## 4. Know the signs of an overdose.

People having a drug overdose may have one or more of the following signs:

- The person is “**nodding off**”, won't wake up easily, or is unresponsive
- Person is breathing very slowly or not at all
- Lips and fingernails are blue
- Skin is cold and clammy
- Body is limp
- Person may be snoring or gurgling
- Person may be choking or throwing-up
- Pupils are dilated (Xanax) – Pupils are tiny (Opioids)
- A slow heart rate

All signs of an overdose should be treated as a medical emergency.

## 5. Know what to do if someone is in trouble.

- CALL 9-1-1
- Stay with the person until paramedics arrive. If possible, provide paramedics with a sample of the drug.
- Turn person on their side and put into the recovery position.
- Good **Samaritan** laws offer legal protection to people who give reasonable assistance to those who are, or who they believe to be, injured, ill, in peril, or otherwise incapacitated.

### Get a Naloxone kit for Opioid Overdose

Naloxone is the drug used to temporarily stop an overdose from **illicit fentanyl and other opioid** pain medication. This allows time for emergency services to get the person to a hospital to receive medical treatment to save their life. If you have a Naloxone kit you should carry it with you, to ensure that it is available in case there is a situation when the use of substances results in an overdose. You can get a free Naloxone kit from local pharmacies, at KFL&A Public Health and other community partners.

## Helpful websites

Health Canada [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-abuse/prescription-drug-abuse/benzodiazepines](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-abuse/prescription-drug-abuse/benzodiazepines)

Canada.com <https://bodyandhealth.canada.com/drug/getdrug/xanax>

Parent Drug Guide: Know the Facts about Xanax <https://drugfree.org/drug/xanax/>

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)

Parent Action on Drugs [www.parentactiondrugs.org](http://www.parentactiondrugs.org)

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca)

KFL&A Public Health [www.kflaph.ca](http://www.kflaph.ca)

## Community Supports

Addiction and Mental Health Services KFL&A: 613-544-4229

Youth Diversion: 613-548-4535

Street Health Centre: 613-549-1440

Family and Children Services: 1-855-445-3227

Maltby Centre: 613-546-8535

Kingston Youth Services: 613-531-3779

Ontario Provincial Police: 1-888-310-1122

## Reference

1. Parent Drug Guide: Know the Facts about Xanax <https://drugfree.org/drug/xanax/>