

Increase in overdoses observed at The Works on February 26, 2020 February 27, 2020

On February 26, staff at The Works supervised consumption service responded to 16 overdoses between the hours of 1550 and 2300. This is much higher than normal. Several people required follow up care and were transported to hospital.

Samples of the drugs involved in the overdoses were checked using mass spectrometry techniques and found to contain caffeine, fentanyl, and flualprazolam (a novel benzodiazepine). The drugs were primarily purple in colour.

It is not unusual to find some amounts of benzodiazepines in drugs circulating in Toronto. Based on recent results from the [Centre for Drug Policy Evaluation's drug checking project](#), approximately 35% of samples checked that were thought to be fentanyl were found to also have a benzodiazepine in them. However, in the samples from February 26, flualprazolam was found in significantly larger proportions than usual.

The negative effects of using an opioid in combination with a benzodiazepine include respiratory depression and extreme sedation. If naloxone is administered, it will address the effects of the opioids (reverse respiratory depression), but it will not reverse the sedative effects of the benzodiazepines.

Advice for people using drugs

- Use a supervised consumption service. For a list of supervised consumption services in Toronto, see <https://bit.ly/2VzVRYd>.
- Check your drugs at drug checking services, which are available at The Works, South Riverdale Community Health Centre and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre (Queen West site).
- Use with someone else and take turns spotting for each other. If you must use alone, have someone check on you.
- Do a small test dose first.
- Get naloxone. Agencies that have it include: The Works, Parkdale-Queen West CHC, Regent Park CHC, South Riverdale CHC, Fred Victor, Eva's Satellite, Sistering, Sherbourne Health Centre, Seaton House, Agincourt Community Services Association, LAMP Community Health Centre, 129 Peter Street, and Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities at 2660 Eglinton Avenue East.
- You can also get a free naloxone kit at a pharmacy. Find out where at: www.ontario.ca/page/get-naloxone-kits-free or by calling 1-800-565-8603.

**In an overdose situation, get help immediate:
Call 911. Give naloxone. Stay with the person.
It is essential that all overdoses get medical attention.**

In an overdose situation, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* provides legal protection from drug-related charges for carrying drugs for personal use and other simple possession offences.

