

Increase in Overdoses in March 2020

April 4, 2020

Toronto Paramedic Services attended a significantly higher number of suspected opioid overdose calls in March 2020, including the **highest number of overdose-related fatalities in a month since March 2019**. There were 345 suspected opioid overdose calls to paramedics, including 19 fatalities. Complete data for March 2020 is available on the [Toronto Overdose Information System](https://bit.ly/34cm3uf) here: <https://bit.ly/34cm3uf>

Information on the type of drugs involved is not available at this time. However, drug analysis data from previous months shows a more toxic drug supply increasing the risk of overdose, including those that are difficult to reverse. The impact of the toxic drug supply is worsened by the community spread of COVID-19. Please see below for advice on overdose prevention and response while taking precautions to protect from COVID-19.

Advice for people using drugs:

Try not to use drugs alone. Use a supervised consumption service, if possible. In an overdose situation, **give naloxone, call 911, and stay with the person, keeping a 6 foot distance, until help arrives. COVID-19 is spread by droplets from the nose or mouth.** It is essential that all overdoses get medical attention. A list of supervised consumption services in Toronto is available here: <https://bit.ly/3aKMPfF>

- **Use with someone else and take turns spotting for each other. Stay 6 feet from your buddy** to avoid passing the coronavirus. Using a buddy system is safer than using alone.
- If you must use alone, try and call someone you know and have them stay on the phone with you while you use. Tell them your address and keep the door unlocked. They can call 911 if you become unresponsive. Call the Overdose Prevention Line at [1-888-853-8542](tel:1-888-853-8542) if you are about to use drugs and are located in Ontario. For their hours see grenfellministries.org/overdose-prevention-line.
- Do a small test dose first.
- 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).
- 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, John Howard Society at 3313 Lakeshore Blvd West, LAMP CHC, 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](tel:1-800-565-8603).

Important: Naloxone is effective for temporarily reversing the effects all opioids, even if other drugs are involved. However, it does not reverse the effects of other drugs like benzodiazepines. **If someone is overdosing, give naloxone and call 911.**

More COVID-19 harm reduction tips are available here: <https://bit.ly/2V25NaT>

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.

