

High number of overdose deaths in April 2020

May 5, 2020

Toronto Paramedic Services attended a high number of suspected opioid overdose calls in April 2020, including **the highest number of suspected opioid overdose-related deaths in a month since September 2017**. There were 343 suspected opioid overdose calls to paramedics, including 25 deaths. Since May 1st, there have been four deaths attended by paramedics, including three deaths on May 4th.

Suspected opioid overdose calls to paramedics have been higher in February, March and April 2020. There are also community reports of increased overdoses, including fatalities, in the past few weeks. Information on the type of drugs involved is not available. However, analysis through the drug checking project finds an ever more toxic drug supply, increasing the risk of overdose. The impact of the toxic drug supply is worsened for people who use drugs by the impacts of the community spread of COVID-19. We mourn the loss of colleagues, friends, and loved ones who are victims of a long-standing crisis and poisoned drug supply, as well as those who have died from COVID-19.

Toronto Paramedic Services data for April 2020 will be added to the [Toronto Overdose Information System](#) on May 7, 2020, or earlier, if possible.

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://tinyurl.com/y8qkevja>. The Works supervised injection service is returning to regular hours of operation on May 6, 2020 (Monday-Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and Sunday 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.).

- **Use with someone else and take turns spotting for each other. Stay 6 feet from your buddy** to avoid passing the coronavirus. 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 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.

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://tinyurl.com/y92fq2gg>

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.

