

## High number of overdose deaths in May 2020

June 6, 2020

For the second consecutive month, Toronto Paramedic Services attended to higher numbers of suspected opioid overdose-related deaths. There were 287 suspected opioid overdose calls to paramedics in May 2020, including 25 involving deaths. This follows 25 suspected opioid overdose-related deaths in April 2020. The number of suspected opioid overdose-related deaths for April and May 2020 are the highest since September 2017.

Suspected opioid overdose calls to paramedics have been higher in February, March, and April 2020; data are available on the [Toronto Overdose Information System](#).

The increase in paramedic calls related to suspected opioid overdoses and overdose-related deaths since February 2020, shows the impact of the dual crises of the opioid poisoning crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The increasingly toxic drug supply in addition to public health measures needed to prevent spread of COVID-19 continue to create challenges for people who use drugs and for service providers. 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.

### 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 if you are not from the same household, 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 at [toronto.ca/ConsumptionService](https://toronto.ca/ConsumptionService).

- **Use with someone else and take turns spotting for each other. Stay 6 feet from your buddy if you are not from the same household** to avoid passing the virus. 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](https://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](https://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: [toronto.ca/COVID19HarmReduction](https://toronto.ca/COVID19HarmReduction)

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.

