

## Increase in Drug-Related Deaths

July 14, 2020

In the past week, there were 11 suspected opioid overdose-related deaths reported by Toronto Paramedic Services. Between July 8 and 13, 2020, paramedics attended a number of calls related to drug poisonings, and the calls that involved drug-related deaths were largely in the downtown and north-west areas of the city. Information on the types of drugs involved in the deaths is not available at this time.

Fatal suspected opioid overdose calls to paramedics have been consistently higher since March 2020 with a brief decrease in the number of deaths in June. Please see [Toronto Overdose Information System](#) for more information. The tragic loss of 11 lives in the past week highlights the unpredictable nature of the drug supply. In addition, the public health measures needed to prevent spread of COVID-19 continue to create challenges for people who use drugs, and for service providers.

### Overdose response tips:

- **Always give naloxone to someone experiencing an overdose (even if you don't know what drugs the person took).** Some people may have used more than one drug, or the drug they thought they were taking contained unexpected drugs. Naloxone may not work on other drugs, but it will temporarily reverse the effects of any opioids that may be contributing to the overdose.
- **Call 911.** Medical attention is vital, especially with unexpected drugs in the supply. In an overdose situation, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* provides some legal protection from drug-related charges related to personal use and simple possession offences. Stay with the person until help arrives.
- **Wear a face mask or face covering and medical gloves when helping in an overdose.** This will help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

### Overdose prevention advice for people using drugs:

- **Try not to use alone.** Use with someone else and take turns spotting for each other. Stay six feet from your buddy if you are not in the same social circle, or wear a mask or face covering to avoid passing the virus. A buddy system is safer than using alone.
- **Use a supervised consumption service, if possible.** A list of supervised consumption services in Toronto is available at [toronto.ca/ConsumptionServices](https://toronto.ca/ConsumptionServices).
- **If you must use alone, have a safety plan.** Get someone to check on you either by phone or in person. Before you use, call the Overdose Prevention Line at [1-888-853-8542](tel:1-888-853-8542). For their hours and more information, see [grenfellministries.org/overdose-prevention-line](https://grenfellministries.org/overdose-prevention-line).
- **Vet your supply.** Ask others about what they are experiencing with the same drug or batch. **Check what's in your drugs at local drug checking services.** The Works, South Riverdale Community Health Centre (KeepSIX and Moss Park) and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre (Queen West and Parkdale sites) can check for you.
- **Get naloxone.** Kits are available at 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 (3313 Lakeshore Blvd West), LAMP CHC, Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities (2660 Eglinton Avenue East), and other agencies. Free naloxone kits are available at some pharmacies. 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).



*The Works*  
- Needle Exchange