

## Significant Increase in Opioid Deaths in 2020

October 15, 2020

Toronto Paramedic Services data estimates that 132 people died of suspected opioid overdoses between April 1 and September 30, 2020. This is more than double the number (59) reported for the same period in 2019.

In September 2020, paramedics attended to 27 suspected opioid overdose-related deaths, the highest number recorded in a month since this data has been monitored. This high monthly number has only been seen in July 2020 and September 2017. Overall, paramedics attended to 383 fatal and non-fatal opioid overdose-related calls in September 2020, the highest number of monthly calls to date in 2020. Visit [toronto.ca/health/overdosesstats](https://toronto.ca/health/overdosesstats) for more information on updated data for September. Preliminary data show that between October 1 and 13, 2020, paramedics attended to 12 suspected opioid overdose deaths.

Toronto's drug checking service recently found carfentanil, which is a highly potent fentanyl analogue associated with an increased risk of overdose and death, in samples expected to contain fentanyl. Etizolam, a benzodiazepine-related drug, which increases the risk of overdose when combined with opioids, continues to circulate in the unregulated opioid supply in Toronto. Visit [drugchecking.cdpe.org](https://drugchecking.cdpe.org) for more information.

The opioid poisoning crisis is worsening during the COVID-19 pandemic. The tragic loss of more lives to opioid poisonings highlights the challenges faced by people who use drugs.

### **Overdose response tips:**

- **Give naloxone to anyone who looks like they are overdosing on opioids.** Naloxone will temporarily reverse the effects of any opioids 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 covering and gloves. Keep a 6 foot distance from the person whenever you are not providing direct care** to 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, 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 alone, call the Overdose Prevention Line at [1-888-853-8542](tel:1-888-853-8542).
- **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. Visit [www.ontario.ca/page/get-naloxone-kits-free](https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-naloxone-kits-free) or call 1-800-565-8603.

