

High number of overdose deaths in January

February 12, 2021

Toronto Paramedic Services attended 38 calls for suspected opioid overdose deaths in January 2021. This is the highest number of opioid overdose-related deaths reported by paramedics in a month since we began monitoring in 2017. This follows several devastating months of previous record highs: in both October and November 2020, paramedics attended 28 monthly suspected opioid overdose deaths, and in December 2020, they attended 34. Visit toronto.ca/health/overdosestats for more information. Note that Toronto Paramedic Services data does not capture all drug-related deaths.

Detailed information on the drugs involved in the deaths in January is not available. However, teal/turquoise coloured drugs (including shades of blue) have been linked to some overdoses at The Works, and there are reports of red/burgundy coloured drugs connected with overdoses in the Northwest of the city.

[Toronto's Drug Checking Service](#) has recently found higher amounts of fentanyl, carfentanil, and central nervous system depressants, like etizolam and xylazine (an animal tranquilizer) in fentanyl samples. When central nervous system depressants are used in combination with opioids, the risk of dangerous suppression of vital signs is increased (e.g. slowing down of breathing, blood pressure, and heart rate).

We provide this data with respect and a deep appreciation for what they mean, and how they refer to our loved ones, friends, families and colleagues. We mourn the loss of lives to a long-standing drug poisoning crisis which has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overdose response and prevention advice for people using drugs:

- **Try not to use alone.** A buddy system is safer than using alone.
- **Use a supervised consumption service, if possible.** For locations visit: 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 National Overdose Response Service at **1-888-688-NORS (6677)**. You can connect to community members via the [Brave app](#).
- **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 or call 1-800-565-8603.

If someone looks like they are overdosing on opioids, give naloxone and call 911. 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. See overdose response tips in the [5-Step Response](#) poster.



5 STEP OVERDOSE RESPONSE

STEP **1**  **SHOUT & SHAKE**
their name their shoulders

STEP **2**  **CALL 911**
if unresponsive

STEP **3**  **ADMINISTER NALOXONE**
1 spray into a nostril and/or 1 ampule into arm or leg

STEP **4**  **START CPR**
Do CHEST COMPRESSIONS ONLY
during COVID19 – NO rescue breathing

STEP **5**  **IS IT WORKING?**
If NO improvement in 2–3 minutes
repeat steps 3 & 4

STAY WITH THE PERSON

Clean your hands after providing care.