

Recent increase in overdose deaths

May 7, 2021

Over the last five days, Toronto Paramedic Services have attended one of the worst cluster of suspected opioid overdose-related calls involving deaths since we began monitoring this data in 2017. Preliminary data show that from May 2 to 6, 2021, paramedics attended 13 fatal suspected opioid-related overdose calls, including five fatal calls on May 6th, which is the highest daily number of fatal calls on record since we began monitoring this data. These fatal calls have occurred across Toronto. Some supervised consumption services, including The Works, are also reporting an increase in overdoses.

The tragic loss of 13 lives highlights the unpredictable nature of the unregulated drug supply. Detailed information on the drugs involved in the recent overdoses is not available. However, [Toronto's Drug Checking Services](#) continues to find an increasing number of unexpected substances of concern in the unregulated drug supply. **Etonitazene, an opioid more potent than fentanyl, was identified for the first time in May 2021, and was the subject of an [alert](#) from Toronto's Drug Checking Services.** We are also hearing reports of heavy sedation related to consuming yellow fentanyl.

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.