

Drug Alert: Increase in Drug-Related Deaths in Toronto

February 28, 2024

Why are we sending this alert?

- There was an **increase in suspected opioid overdose-related deaths** attended by Toronto Paramedics Services from February 24-27, 2024.
 - During this period, preliminary data shows that there were **6 suspected opioid overdose-related deaths**, which is triple the current average seen for a four-day period in the past twelve weeks.

Additional Information

- There is no additional information available at this time about the specific drugs connected to these overdose related deaths.
- [Toronto's Drug Checking Service](#) continues to confirm that the unregulated opioid supply is contaminated and unpredictable. Recent trends in expected fentanyl samples include:
 - **Increase in medetomidine/dexmedetomidine**, a “new” tranquilizer circulating in Toronto’s unregulated fentanyl supply. Using medetomidine/dexmedetomidine, or other central nervous system and respiratory depressants, such as benzodiazepine-related drugs and xylazine, in combination with fentanyl increases the risk of dangerous suppression of vitals (e.g., slowing down of breathing, blood pressure, heart rate).
 - [Medetomidine and dexmedetomidine](#) are not opioids, meaning **naloxone will not reverse their effects** in an overdose situation. However, **naloxone should still be administered because it will work on any opioids that are very likely present** alongside medetomidine/dexmedetomidine and contributing to the overdose.
 - **Higher than usual concentrations of fentanyl and fluorofentanyl** in expected fentanyl samples, increasing the risk of overdose and greater than normal doses of naloxone may be required to rouse individuals experiencing an overdose.
- Overdoses are occurring largely in the **downtown areas** of the city.

Messages for people using drugs in Toronto:

- **Try not to use alone.** Buddy up with someone who you trust. Keep naloxone on-hand.
- **Use a supervised consumption service, if possible.** For locations and hours of sites please 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.
 - Call the National Overdose Response Service at [1-888-688-NORS \(6677\)](tel:1-888-688-NORS) to get support while using alone.
 - Connect to community members virtually 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.** Your drugs might have unexpected substances in them. Have them checked at one of the drug checking service locations in [Toronto](#).
- **Get naloxone.** Kits are available at Toronto Public Health, The Works, and through many [partner organizations](#). Free naloxone kits are also available at some pharmacies. Visit www.ontario.ca/page/get-naloxone-kits-free or call 1-800-565-8603.

5 STEP OVERDOSE RESPONSE

STEP

1



SHOUT & SHAKE

their name

their shoulders

STEP

2

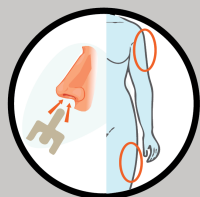


CALL 911

if unresponsive

STEP

3



ADMINISTER NALOXONE

1 spray into a nostril and/or 1 ampule into arm or leg

STEP

4



START CPR

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