

Drug Alert: Increase in Drug-Related Deaths & Nitazene Opioids in Toronto's Unregulated Opioid Supply

March 18, 2024

Why are we sending this alert?

- There was an **increase in suspected opioid overdose-related deaths** attended by Toronto Paramedic Services between March 14-17, 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 4-day period in the past 12 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](#) recently identified **two** “new” high potency synthetic nitazene opioids in Toronto's unregulated opioid supply: **N-desethyl etonitazene** (10 times stronger than fentanyl) and **protonitazepyne** (20 times stronger than fentanyl) and observed an **increase in the presence of** nitazene opioids in samples expected to be **oxycodone (OxyContin), hydromorphone (Dilaudid), hydrocodone, and Percocet**.
 - Since nitazene opioids are potent, the risk of overdose is increased and greater than normal doses of naloxone may be required to rouse individuals experiencing an overdose.
 - The risk of overdose may be further increased for people who use oxycodone (OxyContin), Percocet, hydromorphone (Dilaudid), or hydrocodone, as compared to people who use fentanyl, because their opioid tolerance may be lower.
- Overdoses are occurring **throughout 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.**
 - 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.
 - Benzodiazepines in the unregulated drug supply may cause people to be sedated longer than usual. Following naloxone administration, some people may remain unconscious even after their breathing returns.
- **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](#).

5 STEP OVERDOSE RESPONSE

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

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**
Perform rescue breathing and/or chest compressions

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



During overdose response. Stay up to date with your COVID-19 and flu vaccines.