



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2020PSSG0028-000958
May 27, 2020

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

BC Coroners Service reports increase in illicit drug toxicity deaths in March, April

VICTORIA – The BC Coroners Service has published updated reports on illicit drug toxicity deaths and fentanyl-detected drug deaths to the end of April 2020.

The reports show an average of 3.2 illicit drug toxicity deaths per day in the first four months of this year.

“We remain in a public health emergency, with more than three British Columbians dying each day from illicit drug toxicity deaths,” said Lisa Lapointe, chief coroner. “Illicit drug toxicity death rates in B.C. are still the highest for any jurisdiction in Canada. Every region in B.C. has been impacted.

“Recent efforts to improve access to safe supply in B.C. are encouraging, and the BC Coroners Service supports continued enhancement of this critical life-saving measure. We continue to recommend a regulated, evidence-based, supportive treatment and recovery system as an important pillar in preventing future deaths.

“The BC Coroners Service continues to work with our partners to collaboratively share information to better understand the situation.”

The illicit drug toxicity death totals for March and April 2020, 112 and 117 deaths respectively, mark the first time B.C. has recorded over 100 illicit drug toxicity deaths in back-to-back months since November and December 2018.

Key findings of these drug death reports, based on preliminary data, include:

- In April 2020, there were 117 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths. This represents a 4% increase over the number of deaths in March 2020 (112) and a 39% increase over the number of deaths in April 2019 (84).
- In total, there have been 382 illicit drug deaths to date in 2020 in B.C.
- The townships experiencing the highest number of illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2020 are Vancouver, Surrey and Victoria.
- The Northern Health Authority has the highest rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths (28 deaths per 100,000 individuals) followed by Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (26 deaths per 100,000 individuals) in 2020. Overall, the rate in B.C. is 22 deaths per 100,000 individuals in 2020.
- In 2020, 71% of those dying were aged 19 to 49, and males accounted for 79% of deaths in this year to date, both increases from 2019.
- In 2020, 83% of illicit drug toxicity deaths occurred inside and 12% occurred outside.
- No deaths have been reported at supervised consumption or drug overdose prevention sites.

Quick Facts:

- The BC Centre for Disease Control recently posted an alert on increased drug toxicity reported throughout British Columbia with spikes in fatal and non-fatal overdose events through smoking and injecting.
- The Provincial Health Services Authority launched a new Lifeguard app to help prevent overdoses last week, a made-in-B.C. resource to reduce risk for people who use substances.

Learn More:

Illicit drug overdose death report:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>

Fentanyl-detected death report:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/fentanyl-detected-overdose.pdf>

Lifeguard app:

<http://www.phsa.ca/about/news-stories/news-releases/2020-news/new-lifeguard-app-launched-to-help-prevent-overdoses>

Toward the Heart: <http://www.towardtheheart.com>

BC Centre for Disease Control Overdose Response Indicators:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/overdose-response-indicators>

Stop Overdose BC: <https://www.stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca>

BC Centre on Substance Use: <http://www.bccsu.ca>

Risk mitigation guidelines in the context of dual public health emergencies:

<https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Risk-Mitigation-in-the-Context-of-Dual-Public-Health-Emergencies-v1.5.pdf>

Contact:

Andy Watson
Manager, Strategic Communications
BC Coroners Service
250 356-9253

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: news.gov.bc.ca/connect