



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Illicit drug death count remains high in B.C. during dual health emergencies

VICTORIA – The BC Coroners Service has published updated reports on illicit drug toxicity deaths and fentanyl-detected drug deaths to the end of August 2020, with 147 illicit drug toxicity deaths reported in the month.

The illicit drug toxicity death total represents a 71% increase over the number of deaths in August 2019 (86) but a 16% decrease from the number of deaths in July 2020 (176). The BC Coroners Service has detected a sustained increase of illicit drug toxicity deaths since March, and B.C. has now recorded six consecutive months with over 100 illicit drug toxicity deaths.

Once again, post-mortem toxicology testing data published in this most recent report suggests an increase in the number of cases with extreme fentanyl concentrations (exceeding 50 micrograms per litre) in April, May, June, July and August 2020 compared with previous months. From April to August 2020, approximately 14% of illicit drug deaths showed signs of extreme fentanyl concentrations compared with 8% from January 2019 to March 2020.

There have been 1,068 illicit drug deaths to date in 2020 in B.C., based on preliminary data. The total number of illicit drug deaths in the first eight months of 2020 have surpassed the total for all of 2019. The number of non-fatal overdose incidents has also increased significantly. BC Emergency Health Services reports close to 7,500 overdose calls throughout B.C. this summer, making it the highest number of overdose calls ever recorded in a three-month stretch.

Quick Facts:

- Illicit drug toxicity death rates involving males have increased in recent months and have remained high, whereas rates of death involving females declined to average levels in August 2020.
- Illicit drug toxicity death rates for those aged 19 to 59 have increased in recent months and remain high.
- Regionally, the Northern Health Authority has seen illicit drug toxicity death rates increase in recent months and remain relatively high.
- Illicit fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamines continue to be the top drugs involved in these drug deaths.

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>

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

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

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

Risk mitigation prescribing guidelines in the context of dual public health emergencies:
<https://www.bccsu.ca/covid-19/>

Lifeguard app:

<http://www.phsa.ca/about/news-stories/news-releases/2020-news/new-lifeguard-app-launched-to-help-prevent-overdoses> and <http://www.bcehs.ca/about/news-stories/news-releases/2020/lifeguard-app-adds-more-life-saving-features>

BC Centre for Disease Control Overdose Response Indicators:

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

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