
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2022PSSG0060-001453
Sept. 28, 2022

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Nearly 1,500 lost to illicit drugs in first eight months of 2022

VICTORIA – Preliminary reporting released by the BC Coroners Service shows that the toxic drug supply claimed the lives of at least 169 British Columbians in August 2022, bringing the total number of lives lost in the calendar year to 1,468.

“The illicit drug market continues to pose immense risks to people across our province,” said Lisa Lapointe, chief coroner. “People in communities across B.C. are continuing to lose friends, family members and colleagues to the unprecedented toxicity of the unregulated drug supply. I extend my sincere condolences to all of those grieving the loss of a loved one.”

The 169 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths in August represent a 12% decrease from the total reported in July 2022 (193), and equate to about 5.5 deaths per day. So far in 2022, 71% of those dying from toxic drugs were between 30 and 59, and 78% were male.

At least 150 illicit drug-related deaths have been recorded in B.C. in every month since October 2020, with the exception of June 2022, when 149 deaths were reported. During that 23-month period, an average of 184 lives have been lost each month.

Illicit drug toxicity is the leading cause of unnatural death in British Columbia and is second only to cancers in terms of years of life lost. At least 10,326 British Columbians have been lost to the illicit drug supply since the public-health emergency for substance-related harms was first declared in April 2016.

“In their March 2022 report, the subject matter experts of the recent Coroners Service Death Review Panel highlighted the urgent need for the development of a provincial framework for safer supply distribution,” said Lapointe. “This measure, along with a governance framework that sets clear goals, targets and timeframes for reducing substance-related deaths, and the establishment of an evidence-based continuum of care for those experiencing problematic substance use, were identified as three key areas to address this public health crisis.”

Additional key preliminary findings are below. Data is subject to change as additional toxicology results are received:

- By health authority, the highest number of illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2022 have been in the Fraser and Vancouver Coastal Health Authorities (455 and 405 deaths, respectively), making up 59% of all such deaths.
- By health authority, the highest rates of death have been in Northern Health (52 deaths per 100,000 individuals) and Vancouver Coastal Health (48 per 100,000). Overall, the rate in B.C. in 2022 is 42 deaths per 100,000 individuals.
- By Health Service Delivery Area, the highest rates in 2022 have been in Vancouver, Northwest, Thompson Cariboo, Northern Interior and Fraser East.

- By Local Health Area, the highest rates in 2022 have been in Lillooet, Cowichan Valley West, Terrace, Alberni/Clayoquot and Merritt.
- In 2022, 82% of illicit drug toxicity deaths occurred inside (56% in private residences and 27% in other inside residences, including social and supportive housing, SROs, shelters, and hotels and other indoor locations) and 16% occurred outside in vehicles, sidewalks, streets, parks, etc.
- No deaths have been reported at supervised consumption or drug overdose prevention sites.
- Analysis of post-mortem toxicology results shows no indication that prescribed safe supply is contributing to illicit drug deaths regionally or provincially.

Learn More:

Illicit drug overdose death report (data to Aug. 31, 2022):

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

Illicit drug toxicity: Type of drug data report (data to Aug. 31, 2022):

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

BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: A Review of Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/death-review-panel/review_of_illicit_drug_toxicity_deaths_2022.pdf

Mode of Consumption Data – Knowledge Update:

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

BCCDC Knowledge update on hydromorphone and illicit drug toxicity deaths:

http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Statistics%20and%20Research/Statistics%20and%20Reports/Overdose/2021.09.15_Knowledge%20Update_Hydromorphone%20and%20drug%20toxicity%20deaths.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/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Risk-Mitigation-in-the-Context-of-Dual-Public-Health-Emergencies-v1.5.pdf>

Lifeguard app:

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

BC Centre for Disease Control overdose response indicators:

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

BC Centre for Disease Control factsheet on etizolam:

<https://towardtheheart.com/assets/uploads/1609802595W XFJ Cm RP6tu1qI04J8t6BzV>

Contact:

Ryan Panton
Manager of Strategic Communications and
Media Relations
BC Coroners Service
236 478-1582

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