



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Toxic drugs claim lives of 192 British Columbians in July 2022

VICTORIA – The illicit drug supply in British Columbia continues to devastate communities throughout the province, with at least 192 lives lost to toxic substances in July, according to preliminary reporting released by the BC Coroners Service.

“As they have for the past seven years, these numbers reflect the ever-present threat that illicit drugs pose to substance users across B.C.,” said Lisa Lapointe, chief coroner. “The unregulated drug market continues to be volatile and toxic, and anyone using drugs purchased from illicit suppliers is at high risk for serious harm or death. We continue to urge those using illicit drugs to access drug-checking services, where available, or visit overdose-prevention sites, where available.”

The 192 lives lost in July represent a 31% increase over the number of deaths recorded in June 2022 (147), and equates to approximately 6.2 deaths per day. Nearly 1,300 deaths due to toxic drugs have been reported to the BC Coroners Service between January and July, which is a record number for the first seven months of a calendar year.

The largest numbers of illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2022 have been recorded in the Fraser and Vancouver Coastal Health Authorities (404 and 360 deaths, respectively), with these two health authorities accounting for 59% of all such deaths during 2022. The highest rates of death in 2022 continue to be reported in Northern Health (53 deaths per 100,000 individuals) and Vancouver Coastal Health (49 per 100,000). Overall, the rate of death in B.C. in 2022 is 42 per 100,000 individuals, more than twice the death rate in 2016 when the public-health emergency was declared.

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 10,158 British Columbians have been lost to the illicit drug supply since the public-health emergency of substance-related harms was first declared in April 2016.

“Families and communities across the province are continuing to suffer the sudden and tragic deaths of loved ones due to toxic drugs,” said Lapointe. “Whether they are chronically substance-dependent or using only occasionally, all of those who access the illicit drug market are vulnerable to serious harms. The subject-matter experts on the recent death review panel urgently recommended significant expansion of safer supply in communities throughout the province in order to reduce the devastation caused by this public-health crisis.”

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

- By health service delivery area, in 2022, the highest rates of death have been reported in

Vancouver, Northwest, Thompson Cariboo, northern Interior and Fraser East.

- By local health area, in 2022, the highest rates of death have been reported in Lillooet, Mission, Terrace, Cariboo/Chilcotin and Powell River.
- In 2022, 84% of illicit drug toxicity deaths have occurred inside (57% in private residences and 27% in other inside residences, such as social and supportive housing, single-room occupancies, shelters, hotels and other indoor locations) and 15% occurred outside in vehicles, parks, on sidewalks, streets, 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 July 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 July 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/1609802595WXFJcmRP6tu1qI04J8t6BzV>

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