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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2022PSSG0017-000322  
March 11, 2022

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
BC Coroners Service

### **Toxic drug supply continues to claim record numbers of British Columbians**

VICTORIA – At least 207 British Columbians were lost to toxic illicit drugs in January 2022, according to preliminary data released by the BC Coroners Service.

“The new year has started with the loss of 207 more British Columbians to the toxic illicit drug supply in our province,” said Lisa Lapointe, chief coroner. “I extend my heartfelt condolences to the many families grieving the loss of a loved one in communities large and small. As we near the six-year anniversary of the declaration of B.C.’s public health emergency into substance-related harms, it is clearer than ever that traditional approaches to substance use are hurting people and costing lives. I am hopeful that the recent recommendations made by the Coroners Service Drug Toxicity Death Review Panel will support the meaningful change underway in our province and an end to this tragic crisis.”

January is the fourth consecutive month in which more than 200 lives were lost to the illicit drug supply in B.C. The 207 deaths is the third highest recorded in a calendar month, an average of about 6.7 deaths per day.

While illicit drug toxicity death rates remain high throughout the province, there have been notable increases in smaller and medium-sized communities. The 11 recorded deaths in Kamloops in January made it the third most affected township in B.C. behind only Vancouver and Surrey. And the 19 deaths recorded in Northern Health equates to a death rate of 74.5 per 100,000 residents, by far the highest rate of any health authority.

Post-mortem toxicology results underscore the increased volatility and toxicity of the illicit drug supply. Between November 2021 and January 2022, approximately 23% of tests returned extreme levels of fentanyl (concentrations exceeding 50 micrograms per litre), compared to 13% of results between April 2020 and October 2021. Both Northern Health (29%) and Vancouver Coastal Health (27%) had averages that exceeded the average for the province.

“We know that illicit substances in our province are toxic and that those dependent on them are vulnerable to serious harms and death,” Lapointe said. “Ensuring access to safer supply, establishing a substance use system of care, and turning the focus away from punishing and stigmatizing are critical steps to resolving this public health emergency.”

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

- 72% of those dying in January were aged 30 to 59, and 82% were male.
- The townships that experienced the highest number of illicit drug toxicity deaths in January were Vancouver, Surrey and Kamloops.
- By health authority in 2022, the highest number of illicit drug toxicity deaths were in

Fraser and Vancouver Coastal Health Authorities (70 and 57 deaths, respectively), making up 61% of all such deaths during this period.

- By health authority in January, the highest rates were in Northern Health (75 deaths per 100,000 individuals) and Vancouver Coastal Health (54 per 100,000). Overall, the rate in B.C. is 47 deaths per 100,000 individuals in 2022.
- In January, 85% of illicit drug toxicity deaths occurred inside (55% in private residences and 30% in other residences, including social and supportive housing, single room occupancy, shelters, and hotels and other indoor locations); 14% occurred outside in vehicles, on sidewalks, streets, parks, etc.
- No deaths have been reported at supervised consumption or drug overdose prevention sites.
- There is no indication that prescribed safe supply is contributing to illicit drug deaths.

### Learn More:

Illicit drug overdose death report (data to Jan. 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 Jan. 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, released on March 9, 2022: [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/death-](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/death-reviewpanel/review_of_illicit_drug_toxicity_deaths_2022.pdf)

[reviewpanel/review\\_of\\_illicit\\_drug\\_toxicity\\_deaths\\_2022.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/death-reviewpanel/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>

BC Centre for Disease Control knowledge update on hydromorphone and illicit drug toxicity deaths: [2021.09.15\\_Knowledge\\_Update\\_Hydromorphone\\_and\\_drug\\_toxicity\\_deaths.pdf](https://www.bccdc.ca/2021.09.15_Knowledge_Update_Hydromorphone_and_drug_toxicity_deaths.pdf) ([bccdc.ca](https://www.bccdc.ca))

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/1609977106OOyN2HFTIkYYKxfbZi8XL6s1NfTIHI0ejSYqQnt.pdf>

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