



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Unregulated drug supply claims 184 British Columbians in June 2023

VICTORIA – Data released by the BC Coroners Service continues to reflect the significant risks associated with the illicit drug market, with more than 1,200 deaths attributed to toxic drugs in the first six months of this year.

“British Columbia is continuing to lose community members at record rates as a result of the toxicity of the unregulated drug market,” said Lisa Lapointe, chief coroner. “Illicit fentanyl continues to drive the crisis, which is causing deaths in large and small municipalities, towns and cities across the province. This health emergency is not confined to one neighbourhood or one demographic. Anyone accessing an illicit substance is at risk of serious harm or death.”

As has been the case for more than a decade, illicit fentanyl continues to be the primary driver in unregulated drug deaths. Fentanyl and/or a fentanyl analogue was present in more than 90% of expedited toxicological testing in June, while nearly three-quarters of tests indicated the presence of a stimulant. Almost all unregulated drug deaths are the result of mixed drug toxicity.

Consistent with historical trends, more than 80% of reported deaths in 2023 have occurred indoors, with nearly half taking place in a private residence. Smoking continues to be the predominant mode of consumption in suspected unregulated drug deaths, with nearly seven out of every 10 investigations indicating that the decedent smoked their substances.

Unregulated drug toxicity is the leading cause of death in British Columbia for persons aged 10 to 59, accounting for more deaths than homicides, suicides, accidents and natural disease combined. The lives of at least 12,509 British Columbians have been lost to unregulated drugs since the public health emergency was first declared in April 2016.

“As coroners, we speak every day to families who are grieving the loss of a loved one,” Lapointe said. “Our agency continues to recommend rapid expansion of a safer drug supply throughout the province to reduce the significant harms associated with the toxic illicit drug market and prevent future deaths.”

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

- The number of unregulated drug deaths in June equates to about 6.1 deaths per day.
- In 2023, 70% of those dying were aged 30 to 59, and 77% were male.
- The townships experiencing the highest number of unregulated drug deaths in 2023 are Vancouver, Surrey, and Greater Victoria.
- By health authority, the highest number of unregulated drug deaths are in Vancouver Coastal and Fraser Health authorities (363 and 338 deaths, respectively), making up 57%

of all such deaths during 2023.

- The highest rates of death in 2023 are in Northern Health (60 deaths per 100,000 individuals) and Vancouver Coastal Health (57 per 100,000). Overall, the rate of death in B.C. is 45 deaths per 100,000 individuals.
- By health service delivery area, the highest rates of death in 2023 are in Vancouver, Northwest, Northern Interior, Central Vancouver Island and North Vancouver Island.
- By local health area, the highest rates in 2023 are in Vancouver - Centre North, Terrace, Greater Campbell River, Princeton and Greater Nanaimo.

Learn More:

Unregulated drug death report (data to June 30, 2023): <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiOGFhMTkwOTktYWQ1My00MzQ4LTlhInZltMzVhOWY3NGFmOWQ4IiwidCI6IjZmZGI1MjAwLTNkMGQtNGE4YS1iMDM2LWQzNjg1ZTM1OWFkYyY9>

Unregulated drug death: Type of drug data report (Data to Jan. 31, 2023): <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug-type.pdf>

Youth Unregulated Drug Toxicity Deaths, 2017-22: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/youth_drug_toxicity_deaths_2017-2022_-_final.pdf

BCCDC Knowledge Update on Opioid Use Disorder Among Youth in B.C.: http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Statistics%20and%20Research/Statistics%20and%20Reports/Overdose/2023.06.06_OUD_youth_infographic.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>

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