



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Update from BC Coroners Service about increasing deaths from unregulated drugs

VICTORIA – In response to a recent increase in deaths caused by toxic drugs, the BC Coroners Service is issuing a public safety warning to anyone using substances purchased from the illicit market.

In its October 2023 update, the coroners service revealed that the province is expected to record an unprecedented number of unregulated drug-related deaths in 2023. Since that update was released, the number of deaths due to drug toxicity has increased above earlier indications.

In recognition of how difficult the holiday season is for those who have lost loved ones, there has historically not been a monthly drug-death reporting update in December. It is important, however, to ensure that people are aware of the continuing risks related to the unregulated drug market and of recent increases in deaths reported.

While data is still under review, preliminary indications suggest unregulated drug toxicity has caused more than 200 deaths in November 2023, and that the province has averaged about seven deaths per day for the past seven weeks.

Unregulated drug deaths in the winter months have historically increased over the numbers reported during the rest of the year, so this early increase could be a sign of another challenging season for people who use drugs in B.C.

Please do not use drugs alone. It is critically important that people take advantage of every available support to keep themselves safe. This includes accessing local safe consumption sites (SCS) and/or overdose prevention sites (OPS), and/or drug checking services where available. It is recommended that anyone using drugs do so only in the presence of someone who will be able to provide naloxone and/or first aid and call 911.

Local health authorities and harm-reduction organizations will continue to provide health advisories as needed as they are best positioned to respond quickly to local concerns.

Recent reports of counterfeit hydromorphone tablets in Interior Health make clear that even substances presumed to be safe carry significant risk. The only way to be certain about the substances contained in a product that is purchased illicitly is by having it tested by an approved service.

Learn More:

Unregulated drug death report (data to Oct. 31, 2023):
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?>

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

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-anddivorce/deaths/coroners-service/death-reviewpanel/review_of_illicit_drug_toxicity_deaths_2022.pdf

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