

INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General BC Coroners Service

More than 14,500 lives lost to unregulated toxic drugs, eight years into public health crisis

VICTORIA – Unregulated toxic drugs claimed the lives of 182 people in April 2024 according to preliminary data from the BC Coroners Service.

While this represents a 24% decrease from the number of deaths in April 2023 (239), the risk posed by unregulated drug supply remains very high.

April 2024 marks eight years since the public health emergency was first declared. At least 14,582 people in the province have lost their lives to toxic drugs in that time, including 763 in the first four months of 2024. Unregulated drug toxicity is the leading cause of death for people in British Columbia aged 10 to 59, and accounts for more deaths than homicides, suicides, accidents and natural disease combined.

Fentanyl continues to be the primary driver of unregulated toxic-drug deaths in 2024, detected in 82% of toxicological test results. Coroner investigations confirm that substances were consumed through smoking in nearly three-quarters of the deaths in April.

Nearly 50% of decedents in April were between the age of 30 and 49 and seven in 10 were males. Toxic drugs continue to claim the lives of about six people in British Columbia per day.

Additional notable findings from the latest report include:

- The death rate for females has nearly doubled since 2020, from about 13 to 23 per 100.000 in 2024.
- Vancouver, Surrey and Greater Victoria experienced the most loss of life in April from unregulated toxic drugs, followed closely by Prince George and Nanaimo.
- By health authority, the highest number of lives lost to toxic drugs in April were in Vancouver Coastal and Fraser Health (56 and 51 respectively), making up nearly 60% of all such deaths.
- Eighty-three per cent of unregulated drug deaths in 2024 occurred inside (48% in private homes and 35% inside social and supportive housing, single-room occupancies, shelters, hostels and other indoor locations).

The data shared by the BC Coroners Service is subject to change as additional toxicology results are received.

Learn More:

To learn more about April 2024 unregulated drug toxicity deaths,

visit: https://app.powerbi.com/view?

r=eyJrIjoiNjRhYTBhNmUtMDBmNy00YWYxLTkzMTMtMDI5NmZiM2Y1MzhmIiwidCl6IjZmZGl1Mj

AwLTNkMGQtNGE4YS1iMDM2LWQzNjg1ZTM1OWFkYyJ9

To learn more about youth unregulated drug toxicity deaths, 2019-2023, visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/youth unregulated drug toxicity deaths in bc 2019-2023.pdf

To learn more about BCCDC knowledge update: Opioid Use Disorder Among Youth in BC, visit: http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Statistics%20and%20Research/Statistics%20and%20Reports/Overdose/2023.06.06_OUD_youth_infographic.pdf

To learn more about BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: An Urgent Response to a Continuing Crisis, visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/death-review-panel/an urgent response to a continuing crisis report.pdf

To learn more about BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: A Review of Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths, visit: 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

To learn more about Toward the Heart, visit: https://www.towardtheheart.com

To learn more about stopping overdose in B.C., visit: https://www.stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca

To learn more about BC Centre on Substance Use, visit: https://www.bccsu.ca

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