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## INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
BC Coroners Service

### **177 lives lost to toxic drugs in February 2024: BC Coroners Service**

VICTORIA – Preliminary reporting from the BC Coroners Service confirms that at least 177 people in British Columbia were lost to toxic, unregulated drugs in February.

The total number of lives lost reflects an 11% decrease from the number investigated by the Coroners Service in February 2023, and a 12% decrease from the number reported in January 2024. However, February is also the 20th consecutive month in which there have been at least 175 deaths suspected to be caused by the toxic-drug supply reported by the agency. An average of 6.1 lives were lost per day in February 2024.

Rates of death throughout the province remain significantly elevated. The provincewide rate of death for the first two months of 2024 is 40.1 per 100,000 residents, which is below the record numbers reported in 2023 but still nearly twice the rate recorded in 2016, the year the public-health emergency was first declared. Of note, both the Northern (76.7) and Island (54.3) health authorities recorded record-high rates of death in the first two months of 2024.

Toxicological testing continues to reflect a volatile and inconsistent drug supply throughout B.C. As has been the case throughout the toxic-drug crisis, fentanyl and/or one of its analogues has been identified in about eight out of every 10 test results in 2024, often in combination with cocaine, methamphetamine and/or other substances. Nearly every unregulated drug death is the result of mixed drug toxicity.

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 14,208 British Columbians have been lost to unregulated drugs since the public-health emergency was first declared in April 2016.

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

- The townships experiencing the highest number of unregulated drug deaths in 2024 are Vancouver, Surrey and Nanaimo.
- By Health Service Delivery Area in 2024, the highest rates have been recorded in Northern Interior, North Vancouver Island, Central Vancouver Island, Vancouver and Thompson Cariboo Shuswap.
- By Local Health Area in 2023, the highest rates have been recorded in Vancouver-Centre North, Hope, Alberni/Clayoquot, Terrace and Greater Campbell River.
- In 2024, 86% of unregulated drug deaths occurred inside (48% in private residences and 38% in other inside residences including social and supportive housing, SROs, shelters, and hotels and other indoor locations) and 13% occurred outside in vehicles, sidewalks,

streets, parks, etc.

- There is no indication that prescribed safer supply is contributing to unregulated drug deaths. In 2023/24, hydromorphone was detected in 3% of unregulated drug deaths that have undergone expedited toxicology testing.

### **Learn More:**

To read the unregulated drug death report (data to Feb. 29, 2024),

visit: [https://app.powerbi.com/view?](https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiOGJmNzZmOWQtMjc1My00ZTFhLTlkZWQtOWM3YmMxZjc1NWNlIiwidCI6IjZmZGI1MjAwLTNkMGQtNGE4YS1iMjM1OWFkYyJ9)

[r=eyJrljoiOGJmNzZmOWQtMjc1My00ZTFhLTlkZWQtOWM3YmMxZjc1NWNlIiwidCI6IjZmZGI1MjAwLTNkMGQtNGE4YS1iMjM1OWFkYyJ9](https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiOGJmNzZmOWQtMjc1My00ZTFhLTlkZWQtOWM3YmMxZjc1NWNlIiwidCI6IjZmZGI1MjAwLTNkMGQtNGE4YS1iMjM1OWFkYyJ9)

To read the report Youth Unregulated Drug Toxicity Deaths, 2017-2022, visit:

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/youth\\_drug\\_toxicity\\_deaths\\_2017-2022.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/youth_drug_toxicity_deaths_2017-2022.pdf)

To read the 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](http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Statistics%20and%20Research/Statistics%20and%20Reports/Overdose/2023.06.06_OUD_youth_infographic.pdf)

To read the report, 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](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 read the report, 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](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 read the report Mode of Consumption Data – Knowledge Update, visit:

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/bccs\\_illicit\\_drug\\_mode\\_of\\_consumption\\_2016-2021.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/bccs_illicit_drug_mode_of_consumption_2016-2021.pdf)

To read the BCCDC Knowledge Update on hydromorphone and illicit drug toxicity deaths, visit:

[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](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: <https://www.towardtheheart.com>

Stop Overdose BC: <https://www.stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca>

BC Centre on Substance Use: <https://www.bccsu.ca>

Lifeguard app: <https://www.phsa.ca/about/news-stories/news-releases/2020-news/new-lifeguard-app-launched-to-help-prevent-overdoses>

BC Centre for Disease Control factsheet on

etizolam: <https://towardtheheart.com/assets/uploads/1609802595WXFJcMRP6tu1qI04J8t6BzV>

**Contact:**

Ryan Panton  
Manager of Strategic Communications and  
Media Relations  
BC Coroners Service  
236 478-1582

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