



INFORMATION BULLETIN

For Immediate Release
2024PSSG0013-000261
Feb. 29, 2024

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Nearly 200 British Columbians lost to toxic drugs in January 2024

VICTORIA – The ongoing drug toxicity public-health emergency continues to devastate communities throughout British Columbia, with at least 198 deaths suspected to have been caused by toxic, unregulated drugs reported to the BC Coroners Service in January 2024.

The total number of deaths in January equates to about 6.4 lives lost per day. As has been the case throughout the emergency, about seven out of every 10 decedents in January were between 30 and 59 years of age, and more than three-quarters were male.

No area of the province has been spared the impacts of the toxic-drug crisis. The health service delivery areas with the highest rates of death in January were Northern Interior, North Vancouver Island, Central Vancouver Island, Vancouver and Northeast. Provincewide, the rate of death in January was about 42 per 100,000 residents, representing a small decrease from the record levels in 2023 but still more than two times the rate reported in B.C. when the public-health emergency was first declared in April 2016.

Unregulated drug toxicity is the leading cause of death in British Columbia for people aged 10 to 59, accounting for more deaths than homicides, suicides, accidents, and natural disease combined. The lives of at least 14,024 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 198 suspected unregulated drug deaths in January represents a 14% decrease from the number of deaths in January 2023 (229) and a 10% decrease from the number of deaths in December 2023 (221).
- The townships experiencing the highest number of unregulated drug deaths in 2024 are Vancouver, Surrey and Nanaimo.
- By health authority, in January 2024, the highest number of unregulated drug deaths were in Fraser and Vancouver Coastal Health authorities (61 and 51 deaths respectively), making up 57% of all such deaths in 2024. The highest rates were in Northern Health (81 deaths per 100,000 individuals) and Island Health (50 per 100,000).
- There is no indication that prescribed safer supply is contributing to unregulated drug deaths. In 2023, hydromorphone was detected in 3% of unregulated drug deaths that have undergone expedited toxicology testing.

Learn More:

Unregulated drug death report (data to Jan. 31, 2024): <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiZTBiZDRmOGUtZGNjOC00NTVklTliYTctYmQwNzIxMzZDE0liwidCI6IjZmZGI1MjAwLT>

[NkMGQtNGE4YS1iMDM2LWQzNjg1ZTM1OWFkYyJ9](#)

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

BCCDC Knowledge Update: Opioid Use Disorder Among Youth in BC:
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: An Urgent Response to a Continuing Crisis:
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

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/bccs_illicit_drug_mode_of_consumption_2016-2021.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: <https://www.towardtheheart.com>

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

BC Centre on Substance Use: <https://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:
<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

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: news.gov.bc.ca/connect