



INFORMATION BULLETIN

For Immediate Release
2024PSSG0050-000819
May 28, 2024

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

126 deaths over five years linked to unregulated drug toxicity in B.C. children, youth

VICTORIA – Updated data from the BC Coroners Service reflects the continued deadly risks posed by the toxic-drug supply in the province.

From 2019 to 2023, 126 children and youth lost their lives to unregulated drugs.

A total of 28 youth deaths are attributed to unregulated drug toxicity in 2023, just above 1% of the 2,551 lives lost to toxic drugs last year. Unregulated drug toxicity is the leading cause of unnatural death for this age group, annually claiming the lives, on average, of 25 people under the age of 19 each year between 2019 and 2023.

Toxicological testing detected fentanyl and/or a fentanyl analogue in 83% of all unregulated drug toxicity deaths among youth. Other opioids, including heroin, codeine, methadone and hydromorphone were found in 30 of the 126 deaths reported. Hydromorphone, specifically, was detected in 16 deaths, but was not detected alone in any of the deaths; at least one other substance that contributed to the death was detected in each case.

Young people between 17 and 18 years old accounted for 60% of unregulated drug toxicity deaths during the period reviewed. Just over half of decedents were females, in contrast to the general population where about eight in every 10 lives lost is male.

Of the 126 children and youth who died from unregulated drug toxicity, 85 had a mental-health diagnosis, or had displayed evidence of one. Two-thirds were currently receiving, or had received, services offered through the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

The report's data is subject to change as additional toxicology results are received.

Learn More:

To read the full report on Children and Youth Unregulated Drug Toxicity Deaths in BC, 2019-2023 visit: http://news.gov.bc.ca/files/ChildYouthToxicityDeaths2019_23.pdf

BCCDC Knowledge Update: Opioid Use Disorder Among Youth in BC:
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

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

Media inquiries:

Amber Schinkel

Manager, Strategic Communications and Media Relations

BC Coroners Service

236 969-1759

amber.schinkel@gov.bc.ca

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