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## NEWS RELEASE

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BC Coroners Service  
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

### **B.C. experiences record loss of life due to drug toxicity**

VICTORIA – An increasingly toxic and volatile illicit drug supply has claimed at least 201 lives in October and 1,782 lives in the first 10 months of 2021, according to the latest preliminary data released by the BC Coroners Service.

“Today is a heart-rending milestone for our province,” said Lisa Lapointe, B.C.’s chief coroner. “The deaths of more than 200 of our community members in one month due to toxic drugs is a devastating loss. In the sixth year of this public health emergency, we are experiencing a record loss of life and I know this news will resonate with tremendous sadness amongst the thousands of families who have lost a loved one to this crisis. My thoughts continue to be with every family and community that is grieving the loss of a loved one.”

October is the first month in which 200 lives were lost to illicit drugs in B.C. The 1,782 lives lost between January and October already represent the highest number of deaths due to drug toxicity ever recorded in the province in a calendar year. More than 8,300 people have died as a result of drug toxicity since the public health emergency into substance-related harms was declared in April 2016.

The impacts of the illicit drug crisis are being felt by communities throughout B.C. While the largest numbers of deaths continue to be recorded in urban centres such as Vancouver, Surrey and Victoria, the rates of death per 100,000 residents are at record levels in every health authority, including Vancouver Coastal (47.6), Interior (45.0), and Northern (44.8). The overall rate of death in the province stands at 41.2 per 100,000 residents, more than double the rate recorded in 2016 (20.4).

“This is a health crisis,” Lapointe said. “I cannot stress enough how urgent this emergency has become. A comprehensive plan to ensure access to safe supply for the thousands of B.C. residents dependent on these substances is essential. Shifting from a punishment and stigmatizing regime to a decriminalized, health-focused model is also a critical step to reduce suffering and save lives.”

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

- 71% of those who have died as a result of suspected drug toxicity in 2021 were aged between 30 and 59, and 79% were male.
- The number of illicit drug toxicity deaths in October 2021 equate to about 6.5 deaths per day.
- By health service delivery area (HSDA), in 2021, the highest rates of death were in

- Vancouver, Thompson Cariboo, Northwest, North Vancouver Island and Fraser East.
- By local health area (LHA), in 2021, the highest rates of death were in Upper Skeena, Lillooet, Merritt, North Thompson, and Enderby.
  - Illicit drug toxicity deaths in B.C. rank second only to cancer in terms of years of life lost. The median age of those who died as a result of illicit drug toxicity in 2020 was 43.
  - Analysis shows no indication that prescribed safe supply is contributing to illicit drug deaths.

**Learn More:**

Illicit drug overdose death report (Data to Oct. 31, 2021):

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>

Illicit drug toxicity: Type of drug data report (Data to Oct. 31, 2021):

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug-type.pdf>

BCCDC Knowledge update on hydromorphone and illicit drug toxicity deaths:

[2021.09.15 Knowledge Update Hydromorphone and drug toxicity deaths.pdf \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug-type.pdf)

Toward the Heart: <http://www.towardtheheart.com>

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

BC Centre on Substance Use: <http://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: <http://www.phsa.ca/about/news-stories/news-releases/2020-news/new-lifeguard-app-launched-to-help-prevent-overdoses>

BC Centre for Disease Control overdose response indicators: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/overdose-response-indicators>

BC Centre for Disease Control fact sheet on etizolam:

<https://towardtheheart.com/assets/uploads/1609977106OOyN2HFTIkYYKxfbZi8XL6s1NfTIHI0ejSYqQnt.pdf>

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