

KNOW YOUR DRUGS 101

How To Prevent & Respond to an Opioid Overdose & Use Substances More Safely

CSSDP
TORONTO CHAPTER

THE OPIOID OVERDOSE CRISIS

Between Jan 2016 – Dec 2020, Canada

21,174 apparent opioid toxicity deaths

This is more than the number of people who died during the height of the HIV epidemic in Canada.

In 2020 alone

6,214 apparent opioid related deaths

In 2020, Toronto

529 people died from opioid toxicity

These deaths are preventable.

According to Toronto Public Health, this is

81%+ from the 239 deaths in 2019

KNOW THE SIGNS OF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

Anyone using opioids or street drugs can overdose.

The risk of overdose increases when fentanyl and other potent substances are mixed into these drugs. It is difficult to gauge the contents and concentration of substances within the unregulated drug supply.

An overdose occurs when a drug overwhelms the body. As a result, the central nervous system cannot control basic life functions like breathing and heart rate.

SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE:

Blue lips/nails & pinpoint pupils

Slow, weak, or no breathing

Can't be woken up

Choking, gurgling, or snoring sounds

Dizziness & confusion

Drowsiness /difficulty staying awake

5-STEP RESPONSE PLAN

Stay with the person and follow these five steps, call for help and put the person in the recovery position:



1 Shout & clap to get their attention

2 Call 911

3 Administer naloxone

4 Start CPR including rescue breathing

5 Is it working? If no improvement in 2-3 minutes, repeat steps 3 & 4.

WHERE TO GET NALOXONE & RESPONSE TRAINING

Naloxone temporarily reverses opioid overdoses by bumping opioids off of receptors in the brain – allowing the person to breathe and regain consciousness.

Naloxone will not cause harm to an individual who is unconscious due to a non-opioid overdose and should therefore be administered in the case of a suspected drug overdose.

It is safe to administer naloxone to anyone, including someone who is pregnant. Naloxone administration is recommended even if you are not entirely sure that the person has overdosed on an opioid.



Naloxone does not reverse overdoses from other types of drugs and may cause withdrawal symptoms in someone with opioid dependence.

Learn more → bit.ly/3ksFfMA



HARM REDUCTION

Harm reduction is an evidence-based approach to policies, programs, and practices that aims to:

- Reduce the negative health, social, and economic consequences related to drug use
- Promote public health, human rights, and social justice

Harm reduction is about meeting people where they are at. Rather than requiring someone to stop using drugs, a harm reduction approach provides services and supplies for people who use drugs to do so more safely. This approach supports people's autonomy and dignity, and respects that people choose to use drugs for a variety of reasons.

Abstinence-based approaches have been shown to be less effective in addressing issues related to drug use.

Many harms associated with drug use can be prevented through safe practices and access to basic services.

EXAMPLES OF HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

Safer sex & drug use supplies

Naloxone distribution

Syringe exchange programs & sharps disposal

Supervised injection & overdose prevention services

Drug checking programs

Education & information
Drug combination education: bit.ly/3BefSeJ

Public health alerts about unsafe drug batches in circulation

Good samaritan policies
bit.ly/3kn0XTY

CANNABIS

Cannabis (marijuana, pot, weed, hash, etc.) is a psychoactive drug that is used for recreational and medicinal purposes.

The main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis is THC, which produces a high, and CBD, which has mostly therapeutic uses. It can be smoked, vaped, dabbed, or eaten.

EFFECTS:

Feeling 'high' a sense of wellbeing, relaxation, & heightened sensory experiences

Increased pulse & heart rate bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils, and increased appetite

Confusion & sleepiness trouble remembering / concentrating, delayed reaction time, paranoia, & anxiety

Health risks depend on the method of consumption and frequency of use.

SAFER USE:

- Avoid synthetic cannabinoids & use lower-potency products
- Vape or eat cannabis instead of smoking
- If consuming edibles, start slowly
- If smoking, don't hold your breath or inhale deeply
- Don't drive, operate machinery, or take risks when high

NOTE In Canada, it is legal to buy, use, possess, and grow cannabis for those 19 years of age or older.

If you are an international student, check the legal status of cannabis use and possession in your home country before travelling as cannabis remains illegal in many countries.

OTHER RECREATIONAL DRUGS

Some recreational drugs are popular in the rave scene but are used in a variety of settings. These drugs can include dissociative anesthetics (ketamine), stimulants (methamphetamine), hallucinogens (LSD), or a combination of multiple (MDMA).

EFFECTS:

Increased energy empathy, pleasure, sociability and altered sensations/hallucinations

Excessive use can cause overdose, but in instances of a fatal overdose, more than one drug is usually involved

Paranoia

teeth grinding, difficulty sleeping, sweating, dehydration, increased heart rate & blood pressure, nausea, vomiting, anxiety, panic, & depression

SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE:

- Mental confusion, panic attacks
- Seizures
- Loss of consciousness
- Hyperpyrexia (life-threatening elevation of body temperature)

CAUTION These drugs can sometimes be cut with fentanyl, a highly toxic opioid. In Canada, it is currently illegal to buy, use, possess, or sell most drugs named as examples in this category.

SAFETY TIPS:

- If you're dancing, take breaks and cool off
- Drink a lot of water and consume electrolytes
- Don't mix with alcohol, MAOIs (a type of antidepressant), DXM, codeine, opiates, or Ritoninavir (HIV treatment)
- Eat before and while you are drinking
- Start slow – try half or a quarter of a dose first (note: a dose lasts 4-6 hours)
- Use less – the more you take, the higher the risk of side effects and the harder you come-down will be once the high wears off

STUDY DRUGS

Study drugs are prescription medications that are meant to treat ADHD and narcolepsy. These drugs can increase concentration and stamina, which has led to their non-prescription use by some students as a study aid.

COMMON STUDY DRUGS:

- Adderall
- Vyvanse
- Concerta
- Focalin
- Ritalin

EFFECTS:

Increased alertness

Dry mouth

Heightened cognitive control (attention & concentration)

Loss of appetite & weight loss

Trouble sleeping

Faster reaction times

Reduced fatigue

At higher dose nervousness, diarrhea, insomnia, psychosis, high blood pressure, seizures, stroke, & sudden cardiac death

SAFETY TIPS:

- Eat regularly
- Maintain a consistent sleep schedule
- Try to utilize a safe and reliable drug source
- Seek medical advice from a regulated health professional
- Be aware of side effects and avoid drug interactions
- Avoid taking with MAOIs (a type of antidepressant)
- Avoid mixing with high amounts of caffeine

NOTE In Canada, it is currently illegal to buy, use, or possess the drugs named as examples in this category without a valid prescription.

ALCOHOL

Drinking is a personal choice. If you plan to drink, consider using it safely and in moderation.

Your personal drinking limit will depend on your weight, tolerance, and history of use.

SAFER DRINKING TIPS:

- Set limits for yourself and stick to them
- Drink slowly and have no more than two drinks in any three hours
- For every drink of alcohol, have one non-alcoholic drink
- Eat before and while you are drinking
- Be aware of prescription and non-prescription drug interactions with alcohol
- Have a designated driver

RESOURCES – CON'T

DRUG CHECKING:

Services provide information on the composition of a drug sample to support informed decision-making about drug use

You can get your drugs checked for contaminants in any of these three frontline harm reduction centres in Toronto:

- Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, 168 Bathurst St
- South Riverdale Community Health Centre, 955 Queen St E
- Toronto Public Health – The Works, 277 Victoria St

Anyone can bring their drugs to be tested. A very small sample (approx. 10 mg) will be analysed at one of two partnering hospital laboratories. Results will be communicated back to you within a day of arrival at the laboratory and will include information about the drugs and their potency in your sample. This service is 100% anonymous and legal. For more information about Toronto's drug checking services, visit → bit.ly/2WsmUYb

SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION AND OVERDOSE PREVENTION SITES:

A safe and hygienic environment for people to inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of qualified staff.

- East End:**
 - keepSIX South Riverdale CHC SCS – 955 Queen E. (at Carlaw)
- Downtown East:**
 - Regent Park CHC OPS – 455 Dundas St. E. (at Parliament)
 - Street Health OPS – 338 Dundas St. E. (at Sherbourne)
 - Moss Park OPS – 134 Sherbourne St. (at Queen St. E)
 - Fred Victor SIS – 139 Jarvis St. (at Queen St. E)
 - The Works SIS – 277 Victoria St. (at Dundas St. E)
- Downtown West:**
 - St. Stephen's Community House OPS – 260 Augusta Ave. (at College St.)
 - Parkdale Queen West CHC: Bathurst SCS – 168 Bathurst St. (at Queen St. W)
- West:**
 - Parkdale Queen West CHC: Parkdale OPS – 1229 Queen St. W. (at Dufferin St.)

COUNSELLING

For University of Toronto students residing in Ontario, the Health and Wellness Centre offers short-term mental health services including single-session counselling, short-term intensive counselling or psychotherapy, pharmacotherapy, and evidence-based group therapy.

You can book an appointment here → bit.ly/3ksQgNQ

Students who reside out of province/country can access counselling support through U of T My Student Support Program (U of T My SSP) 24/7 by calling 1-844-451-9700. Students outside of North America can call 001-416-380-6578.

RESOURCES

HARM REDUCTION:

You can pick up free harm reduction supplies at the community health agencies below:

- St. Stephen's Community House, 260 Augusta Ave
- Toronto Public Health – The Works, 277 Victoria St
- Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, 1229 Queen St W and 168 Bathurst St

For more information, visit → bit.ly/3DliqTF

NALOXONE:

Many pharmacies in Ontario provide free naloxone kits. Check the pharmacy nearest you → bit.ly/2ZUGIEW

CSSDP
TORONTO CHAPTER

To learn more or get involved, feel free to contact us:

toronto@cssdp.org



Designed by Edwina Mui [edwinamui.com](https://www.edwinamui.com)