

PRAIRIE OVERDOSE CRISIS AND COVID-19:

A PANDEMIC WITHIN A PANDEMIC

The Bottom Line

Overdoses have increased as a result of reduced access to services during COVID-19. Many people who use substances have been exposed to excessively unreliable street drugs during COVID-19.

Overdose Crisis in the Prairie Provinces

Alberta

Overdose rates have been increasing since the onset of COVID-19.

In Edmonton: Emergency Medical Services responded to 246 opioid-related emergencies in May 2020. This is 138 more than in May 2019.

The daily average of opioid-related emergency reports was 9 as of May 2020.

In October 2020, there was 904 reported opioid related deaths in Alberta.

Saskatchewan

Overdose rates have been increasing since the onset of COVID-19.

Regina police have reported more overdoses in 2020 as of June 29, 2020 than in all of 2019.

The Saskatchewan Coroner Service determined that the combined total of suspected and confirmed deaths due to drug toxicity was 379 people from January 1-December 31, 2020.

Manitoba

Overdose rates have been increasing since the onset of COVID-19.

Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service administered Naloxone more than 550 times from January-June 2020. This rate is more than double the Naloxone administration rate in all of 2019.

Emergency calls related to crystal meth and opioid overdoses increased 66% in April and May 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

Reported Factors Associated with Overdose Crisis

Factors associated with increased substance use are reduced access to addiction services; reduced access to safe consumption sites and harm reduction resources; isolation; and increased negative mental health. 'Bad batches' of unsafe substances have been circulating within communities. Many legal officials are warning people who use substances to take precautions, which can include carrying Naloxone, using with a friend at a social distance, and test dosing small amounts of the substance before consuming a regular dose - especially if the transaction was made with a new dealer.

Possible Responses

- Advocate for the funding and opening of safe consumption sites.
- Provide information on unsafe substances and alternative options during COVID-19.
- Encourage people who use drugs to practice harm reduction strategies (e.g., test dosing, carrying Naloxone, avoidance of stockpiling) over attempting sobriety during COVID-19 due to the lack of available services and increased isolation.
- Increase frequency of risk assessment and visitation with people who use drugs.



For original sources and documents, please visit: www.childtraumaresearch.ca