



HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

The Bottom Line

COVID-19 has increased the rate of people overdosing in the Prairie provinces. Harm reduction strategies should be put in place to better protect people who use drugs during times of increased isolation and decreased access to services.

Only Have What You Need

- Prepare and store the drug of choice and safe supplies (needles, waters, pipes etc.).
- Ask for carries of methadone. Stock up on medications that help with withdrawal symptoms (Pepto Bismol, Ibuprofen, Imodium) rather than stockpiling harmful or illegal substances.
- Consider having substances stored that may help with coping should you run out of the drug of choice (e.g. Cannabis).
- Avoid panic stockpiling to reduce the risk of overdose, possession charges, and theft from others.

Practice Safer Drug Use

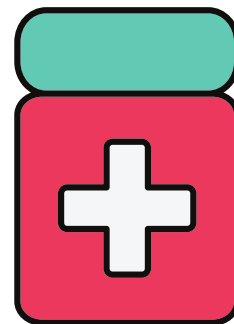
- Ensure hands are washed and all supplies are sanitized before using drugs.
- Do not share drugs or let others prepare your drugs for you.
- Start slow. Participate in a test dose if the drugs are from a new source or if you are alone with no emergency overdose plan. Plan for an overdose by carrying Naloxone.
- Be especially wary of using street drugs during COVID-19. The reliability of these substances has decreased even more so in recent months. This has resulted in alarmingly high death tolls from drug overdoses.
- Know the signs and symptoms of substance poisoning/overdose. Always call 911 for direction and support, even if Naloxone has been administered or the individual appears to be recovering.

Social Distancing

- Pick a few friends and family and try to see only them if possible. Have everyone wash their hands when they come over, and before and after drug use.
- Do not visit anyone if you are sick or have anyone visit you if they are sick. Take care of your physical health as much as possible.
- Due to the reduction in services, try to use substances from a new source with someone at a safe social distance in case of an overdose. While limited, safe consumption sites are available for supervised drug use and for seeking support.
- If you prefer to use alone, ask someone to check on you or use while on the phone with a trusted person able to call for assistance in the event of an overdose.

Responding to an Overdose During COVID-19

- Try to rouse the person to bring them to a state of consciousness. Encourage them to take big breaths. Call 911 if there is no response.
- Check for airway obstruction by tilting their head back and maneuvering their lower jaw to open their mouth.
- Anyone not responding to the overdose should leave the area.
- If rescue breaths need to be provided, do so while wearing a face mask or gently placing a thin piece of cloth or towel over the individual's mouth and nose before administering.
- If chest compressions are needed, the same process of gently covering the individual's mouth and nose should be utilized.
- Administer naloxone. Give 2 doses, if necessary.
- Continuously check for breathing during the revival process. If the individual is still not breathing, repeat the steps until help arrives to ensure oxygen is still getting to their brain.



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

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