



YMCA Youth Opioids Awareness Program

YMCA Programme de sensibilisation aux opioïdes chez les jeunes

WHAT IS AN OPIOID OVERDOSE?

AND HOW TO RESPOND TO IT

All data are for the period January to June 2023 in Canada, if not specified

OPIOID OVERDOSE

Opioids affect your central nervous system, including your breathing and your heartbeat. When you take more opioids than your body can handle (overdose), your **breathing and heartbeat can slow down or even stop**. This can lead to **unconsciousness, coma, and even death**.



There were **22** deaths per day due to apparent opioid toxicity in Canada in 2023 (Jan to Jun)³



81% of the accidental apparent stimulant toxicity deaths involved an opioid.³

54% of accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths involved a stimulant.³

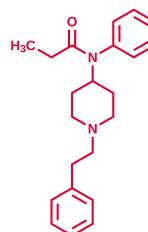
AN OVERDOSE CAN HAPPEN IF YOU MISUSE OPIOIDS

Anyone using can possibly experience an overdose, but there are some factors that can put you at a higher risk, such as:

- using opioids obtained from the unregulated market
- using an opioid not prescribed for you
- taking prescription opioids more often or at higher doses than recommended
- taking opioids with alcohol or other substances.¹

The strength and type of opioids available on the street are unknown and can vary. This can increase the risk of overdose and death. Some opioids called **fentanyl** and **carfentanil** can be particularly dangerous because they:

- can be fatal even in very small amounts
- are being mixed with, or disguised and sold as street drugs¹



fentanyl was involved in **84%** of all accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths.³

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE



Choking sounds



Slow, or no breathing



Cold and clammy skin



Small pupils



Discolouration of lips or nails



Unresponsive

Recognizing overdose symptoms is critical.

Physical signs include **discoloration of lips or nails, constricted pupils, and cold, clammy skin**. Other signs include **choking or snoring sounds, weak or absent breathing or heartbeat, and an inability to wake up**, even when shaken or shouted at.

SAVE A LIFE

An overdose is always an emergency.

If you think someone is overdosing, **call 9-1-1 right away**, or your local emergency helpline if unresponsive.

You can give **naloxone** while you wait for professional help to arrive. If the person resumes breathing, **place them in the recovery position**.

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act provides some legal protection including possession of illicit substances and breach of conditions for individuals who seek emergency help during an overdose.¹

In the first half of 2023, there were over **20,000**

Emergency Medical Services responses to suspected opioid overdoses.³



REDUCE THE RISK

Between March 2020 to October 2023, there were **51,324** overdoses at supervised consumption sites(SCS).²

15,052 of them at SCS required the use of naloxone.²

0 of them were fatal.²

If you choose to use opioids, you can reduce your risk of overdose by:

- not using alone
- using at supervised consumption sites
- "Start low, go slow" approach
- having a naloxone kit available, and knowing how to use it
- not taking opioids with alcohol, or other drugs (unless instructed by your doctor)¹

References:
 1. Health Canada, "Opioid Overdose," Canada.ca, September 5, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/overdose.html>.
 2. Public Health Agency of Canada, "Dashboard: Supervised Consumption Sites," Canada.ca, February 29, 2024, <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/supervised-consumption-sites/>.
 3. Federal, provincial, and territorial Special Advisory Committee on the Epidemic of Opioid Overdoses. Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; December 2023. <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>