

December 22, 2023

Public Health Alert – Drug poisonings

Situation

Northwestern Health Unit has received notice of drug alerts being issued across Ontario and neighbouring provinces in the last several weeks that report increased drug poisonings caused by fentanyl cut with benzodiazepines, xylazine, and caffeine. Opioids, benzodiazepines, and xylazine all have sedative effects. Combining any of these drugs increases risk of overdose/drug poisoning. Naloxone counteracts the opioid but not the other drugs.

The data on suspected drug related deaths in 2023 indicates that of those with evidence of method of drug use, the highest risk method of use is inhalation, followed by injection.

Issue

There may be increased toxicity in the drug supply in our communities. The potential for poisonings and death may be higher than normal.

Risk of drug poisoning is high for all methods of drug use. Non-narcotic drugs may contain narcotics or other unexpected components.

Prevention and Harm Reduction Opportunities

Messaging for patients/clients:

- Not all overdoses are caused by injecting. Inhaling or snorting can be just as deadly!
- Don't use alone. Have someone with you, on the phone, or download and use the [Lifeguard app](#) or call NORS 1-888-688-NORS (6677).
- If using with a friend, do not use at the same time. Make sure the other person is OK before you use.
- Carry naloxone and know how to use it – although not effective on all drugs, it is effective on opioids.
- Call 911 if you think someone is experiencing a drug poisoning/overdose! [The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act](#) provides some legal protection to the person calling.
- Counsel on the range of treatment options for opioid use disorder including opioid agonist treatments.



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

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Resources

- [Northwestern Health Unit - Naloxone and Opioid Overdose Prevention](#)

Contact

Donna Stanley RN

Manager, Sexual Health and Harm Reduction
Northwestern Health Unit