

# The impacts of COVID-19 on the risk of overdose

## NATIONAL RAPID GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

PROVIDERS MAY TAKE THESE KEY POINTS INTO CONSIDERATION; HOWEVER THIS DOCUMENT DOES NOT SUPERCEDE PROVINCIAL / TERRITORIAL REGULATION OR CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

### The overdose crisis

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Canada has experienced increased rates of overdose deaths since the 1990s. The widespread contamination of the illegal drug supply with fentanyl and its analogues has further intensified the crisis.

Overdose deaths are increasing in many parts of Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### COVID-19 impact on drug supply

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People who use substances are reliant on a highly toxic drug market. Due to COVID-19-related supply disruptions, the drug market may be changing to include different or more dangerous substances that increase the risk of overdose and other drug-related harms.

COVID-19 has also disrupted 'open air' drug markets due to public health orders discouraging public groupings of people. As a result, people who are reliant on these markets for drugs may need to travel longer distances, often leading to consuming substances of unknown quality in unfamiliar settings. Without access to typical services and support networks, people who use substances may be at increased risk of overdose and negative health outcomes.

### COVID-19 impact on overdose response

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People consume substances in public locations for many reasons. However, COVID-19 public health restrictions may limit the number of bystanders able or willing to intervene in the event of an overdose, increasing the risk of negative health outcomes and death for people consuming substances in public.

Health care providers and harm reduction services have reduced their capacity to meet COVID-19-related restrictions, further limiting access to overdose intervention and other life-saving services.

### Interventions to limit overdose risk

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Interventions such as temporary supervised consumption services in shelters and other housing settings, and increased access to substance use disorder treatments and replacement pharmacotherapy can limit the risk of overdose and negative health outcomes for people who use substances during COVID-19.

[www.crisp.ca/projects/covid](http://www.crisp.ca/projects/covid)



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