

COVID-19: Harm Reduction and Overdose Response

We recognize that many of the public health messages being shared on COVID-19 are hard to practice when people are living outside, in a tent, in an SRO, or in a shelter. People who use drugs are already doing incredible work to keep communities safe and reduce the spread of infection. We need creative solutions to slow down the spread of COVID-19 and protect people who use drugs, have underlying health conditions, and/or may be elderly.

Risk of overdose

- COVID-19 is a virus that can cause a respiratory infection and other health problems
- Fentanyl and other opioids can slow your breathing rate, so COVID-19 may increase the risk of overdose death when using opioids

Practice safer drug use

- Do not share supplies, such as cigarettes, joints, pipes, injecting equipment, containers for alcohol, utensils, and other supplies. If you have to share, wipe pipes with alcohol wipes or use new mouthpieces.
- Reduce close contact (e.g. shaking hands, hugging, kissing) and ensure condom use
- Wash your hands or use wipes before preparing, handling or using your drugs. Prepare your drugs yourself.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or use tissues. Throw tissues away immediately and wash your hands thoroughly.
- Clean surfaces with soap and water, alcohol wipes, bleach or hydrogen peroxide before preparing drugs if possible
- Carry naloxone and have an overdose plan. Please use breathing masks available in the THN kits if responding to an overdose.

Accessing testing

- For most up to date information on testing please see [BCCDC](#) or use the [self-assessment tool](#)

Buddy up

- Buddy up when you are using. COVID-19 is passed by droplets. Stay 2m (6.5 ft) from your buddy to avoid passing the virus. Using with a buddy is safer than using alone.
- Find your "buddies" who can bring you food, harm reduction supplies, medicine, and substances so that you can stay well. You can also be a buddy to those who may need extra support. Check in on your buddies regularly.

If you are quarantined or in isolation

- See if your buddy can pick up supplies including naloxone from a harm reduction site
- Try to have the substances you need to stay well. Know that carrying large amounts may put you at risk by the police and other people looking to score. Consider alternatives to your drug of choice and prepare for potential supply disruptions.
- You may go through involuntary withdrawal if your dealer gets sick. Have backup plans and be cautious if using a new supply.
- Try to have the medications you need, re-fills may be available directly through your pharmacist or by phone without having to see your physician. If you are feeling unwell and require medications, call your pharmacy in advance.
- Health Canada is working on exemptions to ensure access to OAT and other medicines
- For more information contact: hc.exemption.sc@canada.ca

Continue to use OPS, SCS and supportive housing OPS sites

- Regular cleaning that already takes place at these sites will help reduce the spread of infection

Cleaning

- If you share a washroom with others, clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces, such as knobs, taps, and flushers with soap and water, bleach, hydrogen peroxide or alcohol-based wipes (70%) after every use. Do not mix different types of cleaning solutions.
- If you cannot wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitizer, try to access alcohol-based hand wipes

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For registered harm reduction and naloxone sites in BC

- BCCDC does not anticipate supply chain disruptions
- Registered sites should continue to order supplies as needed weekly/monthly to avoid stock piling
- Please continue to distribute supplies as usual, and note that if there is a specific request for supplies for an individual who requires quarantine or isolation, additional supplies may be provided for the 14-day period
- If you are awaiting your next order to arrive and are temporarily low on any supplies, connect to your local Harm Reduction Coordinator. Individuals can also be referred to nearby existing sites by using the [site finder](#).
- Please circulate this information to any secondary or satellite sites of your location

For more information

- On accessing your local [OPS, harm reduction, and naloxone sites](#)
- On COVID-19 <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>
- On exemptions for OAT and other prescriptions contact hc.exemption.sc@canada.ca
- On BC pharmacists order <https://bcpharmacists.org/covid19>
- For organizations implementing pandemic outbreak response plans <https://sneezesdiseases.com/resource/vch-regional-pandemic-outbreak-response-plans>