



April 22, 2020

To: Community Agency Partners
From: Corinne Dolman, Jana Abetkoff, Maja Karlsson and Judy Sturm – Vulnerable Population Leads, IH COVID-19 Emergency Operations Centre
Re: Overdose Prevention and Response Messaging during COVID-19

British Columbia is in a unique situation, with the current COVID-19 crisis compounding an existing public health emergency declared in April 2016 due to escalating opioid overdoses and related deaths. Extraordinary measures are needed to support people who use drugs (PWUD), including alcohol; and prevent ongoing community spread of COVID-19 among a vulnerable, often immuno-compromised population.

Below you will find some specific messaging that can be shared with PWUD and the people who support them during this challenging time.

Safer Substance Use Messaging

The two public health emergencies have some conflicting messages: “self-isolate to prevent the spread of COVID-19” and “never use drugs alone” to reduce the risk of death by overdose. While this can be confusing for people there are some strategies that can be implemented:

- The [BC Centre for Disease Control's \(BCCDC\) Buddy Up approach](#) – using with a buddy is safer than using alone. You can still stay two (2) metres / six (6) feet away from your buddy to avoid the risk of contracting COVID-19.
- [Safer Drug Use during the COVID-19 Outbreak](#) provides information for PWUD to stay safe during this time.

Safer Drinking Messaging

There have been numerous reports highlighting the increase of alcohol consumption since the onset of COVID-19 and related restrictions. Some of the reasons for increased alcohol use include a change of schedule, boredom and stress¹. Alcohol also remains one of the top four substances noted by the BC Coroners Service as relevant to an overdose death². Please share the following helpful resources regarding safer drinking tips during this time:

- [Safer Drinking Tips during COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19, Alcohol and Cannabis Use](#)

Overdose Prevention & Response:

- Consider working with clients as appropriate to support financial planning in light of the increases in social assistance cheques this month. More illicit drug toxicity deaths occurred during the days following income assistance payment (Wed-Sun) than all other days in 2019.
- [BCCDC](#) and Interior Health (IH) strongly recommend using Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) / Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) during this time, and where available. Both [SCSs in Kelowna and Kamloops](#) and OPSs in Kamloops and Nelson remain open for service. Many shelters and supportive housing are also continuing with their Housing OPS services. Appropriate adjustments to allow for COVID-19 prevention strategies, including physical distancing, are in place.
- [Guidance: Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Public Health Emergencies](#): This guideline from BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) provides direction, based on expert opinion, on how to care for a patient

¹ <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-04/CCSA-NANOS-Alcohol-Consumption-During-COVID-19-Report-2020-en.pdf>

² <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>

struggling with an active substance use disorder that might preclude them from adhering to social distancing and self-isolation measures. The guideline is not intended for the treatment of substance use disorders, but rather to support individuals with substance use disorders to self-isolate or socially distance and avoid risk to themselves or others.

- [Harm reduction information from BCCDC](#) includes some adjustments (bolded below) to the overdose response protocol for responding to a suspected opioid overdose during the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - Stimulate – try and rouse the person; encourage them to take breaths.
 - If no response: call 9-1-1, give breaths to restore oxygen to the brain, and administer naloxone.
 - **Anyone not responding to the overdose should leave the room or immediate area.**
 - When using a take home naloxone kit or facility overdose response box:
 - Put the gloves on and use the face shield/breathing barrier to give rescue breaths.
 - The face shield has a one-way valve and large impermeable area, which protects the responder from respiratory secretions.
 - **After responding, dispose of the face shield before taking off the gloves and wash/clean hands thoroughly.**
 - **If chest compressions are needed, place a towel or a piece of clothing over the person's nose and mouth to protect yourself from droplets.**

Drug Checking:

Visit IH's www.drugchecking.ca website for locations and services for drug checking. Take Home Drug Checking services have been expanded throughout the region. Some adjustments have been made to the Fourier-Transform Infrared Spectrometer (FTIR) drug checking services offered in Nelson and Kamloops, with both locations offering a drop-off service.

Recovery Supports & Relapse Prevention:

There have been many adjustments made to ensure that Mental Health and Substance Use services are available and accessible to support people who are also working through recovery and wanting to prevent relapse. Below is a list of important resources that can be shared:

- For support with an Opioid Use Disorder, contact an [Opioid Agonist Treatment \(OAT\) clinic](#) near you.
- For general support, find a [Substance Use service](#) in your community.
- For mental health or crisis intervention supports:
 - **310 Provincial Mental Health Support Line** at 310-6789 (no area code needed) – for emotional support, information, and resources specific to mental health;
 - **KUU-US (Aboriginal) Crisis Line** – 1-800-588-8717;
 - **Alcohol & Drug Information and Referral Service** at 1-800-663-1441 (toll-free in B.C.) – to find resources and support; and
 - **1-800-SUICIDE** (1-800-784-2433) – if your client is considering suicide or are concerned about someone who may be.