

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 are elderly and/or have underlying health conditions.

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 can increase the risk of overdose death when using opioids

Practice safer drug use

- Do not share supplies, such as cigarettes, joints, pipes, 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
- 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.
- Try to have the medications you need (such as OAT), re-fills may be available directly through your pharmacist or by phone without having to see your physician
- Health Canada is working on exemptions to ensure access to OAT and other medicines
- For more information contact: hc.exemption.sc@canada.ca
- Consider alternatives to your drug of choice and prepare for potential supply disruptions

Continue to use OPS and SCS

- Continue to access OPS, SCS and supportive housing OPS sites
- If you have symptoms, wear a mask if available. Otherwise, cough or sneeze into your elbow or use tissues. Throw tissues away immediately and wash your hands thoroughly. Notify staff if you've tested positive for COVID-19 or if you have symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing).
- 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 (at least 60%) 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, 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
- For organizations implementing pandemic outbreak response plans <https://sneezesdiseases.com/resource/vch-regional-pandemic-outbreak-response-plans>