



Statement from the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada on August 31, 2020

August 31, 2020

Ottawa, ON

Public Health Agency of Canada

In lieu of an in-person update to the media, Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, issued the following statement today:

"There have been 127,940 cases of COVID-19 in Canada, including 9,117 deaths. 89% of people have now recovered. Labs across Canada tested an average of almost 48,000 people daily over the past week with 0.7% testing positive. An average of 435 new cases have been reported daily during the most recent seven days.

Today is International Overdose Awareness Day, a global event that aims to raise awareness of overdose and reduce the stigma of drug-related death. It is also a day to acknowledge the grief felt by families and friends remembering those who have died or had a permanent injury as a result of a drug overdose. The ongoing opioid-related overdose crisis in Canada has claimed the lives of over 15,000 Canadians **from all backgrounds** since 2016 leaving too many members of communities across the country mourning the loss of loved ones, each with their own unique story.

We know that using drugs **while** alone is a major risk factor for experiencing a fatal overdose yet the majority of overdose deaths in Canada occur at home alone. [Stigma](#) plays a significant role. Negative attitudes towards people who use drugs can lead people to hide their substance use, and this stigma can also prevent people from seeking help. Public health measures designed to reduce the impact of COVID-19 may also increase isolation and create additional barriers for people to access the supports they need. People who use drugs need our compassion and support now more than ever before.

All Canadians have a role to play in helping address the drug overdose crisis:

- Know how to recognize the [signs of an overdose](#) and what to do if you witness one
- Learn about [naloxone](#), why it's safe to use if you suspect an opioid overdose, and [where to get a free kit](#)
- Learn why stigma is preventing people from accessing help, and what you can do to [help reduce the stigma around substance use](#)
- For health professionals, learn more about [ways to reduce substance use stigma in the health system](#) and [compassionate, safe and non-stigmatizing communication tools](#)
- Check in regularly on coworkers, friends and family who may be living alone or working from home and get tips on [how to talk to a friend or family member about drugs](#).

In these difficult and unprecedented times, it is important that we recognize substance use disorder as a health and social issue and that we treat people who use drugs with



compassion and provide them the support they need. We must continue to work together to prevent overdose deaths and reduce substance-related harms, just as we are working hard to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on Canadians.”

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