

Good afternoon. I will start with the latest numbers on COVID-19 in Canada – there are now **91,351** confirmed cases, including **7,305** deaths and **49,235** or **54%** have now recovered. Labs across Canada have tested over **1,691,000** people for COVID-19 to date, with about **5%** of these testing positive overall. Over the past week, we have been testing an average of close to **29,000** people daily.

While everyone in Canada is working hard in the fight against COVID-19, there is an increasing concern about a range of unintended consequences of the pandemic response, including for populations already experiencing marginalization due to stigma and other forms of discrimination. Among these unintended consequences is the impact on the ongoing public health crisis of opioid-related overdose deaths and problematic substance use in Canada more broadly.

Last week, the British Columbia Coroners Service reported that unintentional illicit drug toxicity deaths have increased in recent months, with over 100 reported deaths in the province in both March and April 2020. This is a worrying trend, as it has been over a year since British Columbia observed numbers this high sustained over a two-month period.

There have also been spikes in opioid-related overdoses in Toronto and Calgary, and several jurisdictions including Nova Scotia, Toronto and Guelph, Ontario have reported overdoses due to unknown or unusual mixes of toxic illicit substances.

As it remains vital to keep up public health measures to protect all Canadians from COVID-19, we must find ways to maintain lifesaving supports, including treatment and harm reduction services, for loved ones and members of our communities who use drugs. Changes in the illegal drug supply in the wake of COVID-19 may result in increased risk of overdose for person who used drugs.

We know that using drugs alone is a major risk factor for experiencing a fatal overdose. This is why it is so important never to use drugs alone. Always have someone nearby or connect virtually to someone who can monitor you and be ready to call 9-1-1 (or your local emergency help line) if needed.

It is encouraging to see community organizations and orders of government across the country coming together to address the dual public health crises of COVID-19 and drug overdose deaths. Harm reduction and treatment facilities are implementing infection controls and ramping up virtual and mobile services. [The Government of Canada's Wellness Together portal provides wellness and substance use resources free to all Canadians.](#) [British Columbia's Lifeguard App](#) will automatically contact 9-1-1 if you don't click in within 75 seconds of taking a drug. [Stella's Circle](#) in Newfoundland and Labrador is providing clients with technology and Wi-Fi to access online [tools](#). Other [organizations](#) are providing adequate housing, meals and improving access to medications for substance use disorders to minimize drug-related harms and the impacts of COVID-19. It is efforts like these that will help minimize the inequitable and disproportionate effect of the pandemic on an already vulnerable group of Canadians.

Together we can reduce drug-related harms while keeping up with essential public health measures to reduce the impact of COVID-19. Thank you. [Merci](#).