Opioid-related toxicity deaths within Ontario shelters during the COVID-19 pandemic

210

Accidental opioid-related toxicity deaths within shelters between January 2018 and May 2022

Pre-Pandemic Period:

Jan 1, 2018 - Mar 16, 2020

48 deaths

Pandemic Period:

Mar 17, 2020 - May 31, 2022

162 deaths 3.5x increase during the pandemic

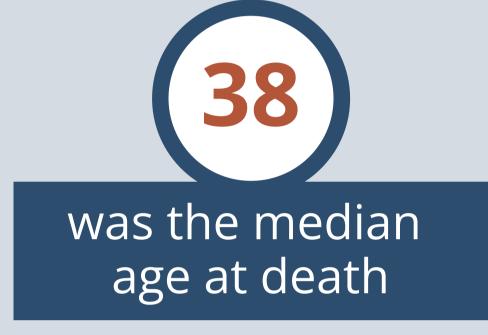
Substances Involved in Opioid-Related Death

| | Pre-Pandemic % of deaths | Pandemic % of deaths | Just 5% of deaths during the pandemic involved only |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Non-pharmaceutical opioids (e.g. fentanyl) | 85% | 94% | pharmaceutical opioids |
| Stimulants | 44% | 71% | ····· 1.5X increase |
| Benzodiazepines (detected) | 27% | 57% | ····· 2X increase |

The remainder of this infographic focuses on deaths in shelters during the pandemic

Demographics









Geography

The public health unit regions with the **highest rates** (per 100,000 population) **of opioid-related toxicity deaths** were:

Toronto Public Health

2.16 (65 deaths)

Ottawa Public Health

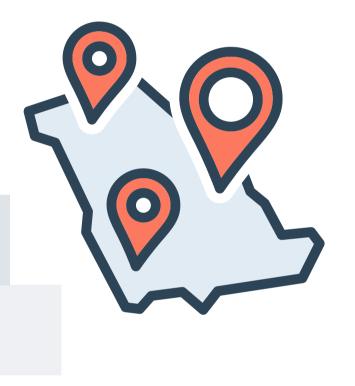
1.92 (20 deaths)

Hamilton Public Health Services

1.70 (10 deaths)

Region of Waterloo Public Health

1.34 (8 deaths)



Mode of Drug Use

Smoking or inhalation of drugs increased during the pandemic



51% of opioid-related toxicity deaths involved smoking and/or inhalation (with or without injection)

13% involved injection alone

Intervention

An individual was present and in a position to intervene in

Resuscitation was attempted

82% of the time



Naloxone was administered

77% of the time

Previous Healthcare Encounters



About 1/2 of deaths occurred among people with an opioid use disorder (OUD) diagnosis

Only 1/3 of those with OUD received opioid agonist treatment in the month before death

In the week before death:

44%

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had a healthcare encounter

1 in 4

visited an emergency department (ED)



1 in 12

had an opioid toxicity treated in ED or hospital

People experiencing homelessness or unstable housing are disproportionately affected by the opioid toxicity crisis. The increase in deaths in shelters highlights the need to invest in expanded access to harm reduction services, connection to healthcare, social care, and treatment programs, and sufficient staff availability, training, and support in these settings.

For more information:

Hamzat B, Leece P, McCormack D, Holton A, Dodd Z, Firestone M, Wolfson-Stofko B, Smuts H, Sereda J, Smoke A, Watford J, Watts T, Shearer D, Schneider E, Singh S, Cheng C, Gomes T, on behalf of the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Opioid-related toxicity deaths within Ontario shelters: circumstances of death and prior medication & healthcare use. Toronto, ON: Ontario Drug Policy Research Network; 2024.





