Significant increase in reports of non-fatal overdoses.

The Direction régionale de santé publique du CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l’Île-de-Montréal (DRSP de Montréal) has received a record number of reports of non-fatal overdoses since the beginning of July 2023.

A large majority of these overdoses are linked to the reported use of fentanyl (in several colours). Numerous mixtures with various depressants were analyzed (e.g., fentanyl with benzodiazepines, nitazenes and xylazine). Overdoses linked to Dilaudid tablets (probably counterfeit) and crack cocaine have also been reported.

Regardless of the substance consumed, naloxone is indicated when a person:

• Has difficulty breathing or does not breathe at all.
• Reacts minimally or not at all to noise and pain.

The person may also present cyanosis (bluish lips and fingernails) and miosis (contracted pupils). These symptoms may progress to cardio-respiratory arrest. In the event of an overdose, call 911 immediately for rapid and effective intervention. Inpatient naloxone administration, under medical supervision or airway management, may be required.

The Montreal DRSP is urging street drug users, regardless of their mode of consumption (inhalation, injection or other), to be cautious. It is also encouraging clinicians and caregivers to enhance overdose prevention interventions with them in the following ways:

1. Inform street drug users of the higher-than-usual number of severe overdoses, potentially linked to the increased presence of xylazine or nitazenes in fentanyl from the illicit market or as a result of the heat of the past few days.

2. Offer counselling about reduced-risk consumption practices:
   • For people who inject, regularly attend supervised injection services.
   • Avoid using alone.
   • When several people are using, avoid using all at the same time.
   • Attend drug-testing services.
   • Reduce the drug dose to test its effects.
   • Have naloxone available in sufficient quantities and know how to use it when someone shows signs of overdose. If in doubt, don’t hesitate to use it. (There is no danger in using it, even if it is not necessary)
   • Call 911 in case of overdose. (The Good Samaritan’s Overdose Witnesses Act provides immunity from prosecution for simple possession to witnesses of an overdose who have called 911).

3. Provide information and support, as needed, to help people obtain free naloxone from pharmacies and community organizations listed in the INSPQ directory.

Further information:

Source: Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal - CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l’Île-de-Montréal: 514-528-2400
4. Adapt services to prevent the effects of heat, especially when the temperature is over 30°C:
   - Be alert to signs of dehydration, which can be similar to signs of overdose: confusion, dizziness, excessive drowsiness and extreme weakness.
   - Provide drinking **water outlets (bottles, cups)**.
   - Ensure that premises are cool and well ventilated. If possible, provide cool areas to help people cool down.
   - Inform people about preventing the risks associated with heat and drug use:
     - Encourage people to drink water regularly to prevent dehydration, **without waiting until they are thirsty**.
     - **Stay in the shade or in cool places (ideally, air-conditioned)**.
     - Wear light, bright clothing.
     - **Take a cool shower daily** or cool off often with a wet towel.
     - **Reduce strenuous physical effort**.
     - Be vigilant when using stimulants, which can aggravate the effects of heat by raising body temperature.
   - Pay particular attention to people over 65 who live alone or have chronic illnesses.

We encourage you to be vigilant and to inform us of any unusual situation by using [the overdose report form](https://santemontreal.qc.ca/en/professionnels/drsp/sujets-de-a-a-z/surdoses/prevention-des-surdoses-liees-aux-drogues) (in French only).

Further information:


Source: Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal - CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l’Île-de-Montréal: 514-528-2400