

# KNOW MORE

**DRUGS: GET THE FACTS. KNOW THE RISKS.**

Know More Opioids Self-Led Learning Experience | Part One

# Know More

Welcome to the Know More Opioids Self-led Learning Experience, brought to you by Health Canada.

Know More Opioids is an education tool to help you get the facts surrounding opioids, ways to reduce risk and the harms of substance use stigma.

The following experience has two parts covering subjects such as: the overdose crisis in Canada, opioids, fentanyl, knowing the signs of an overdose and the impact of substance use stigma.



# Did You Know?

Since 2016, there have been **over 40,642** opioid-related deaths in Canada.

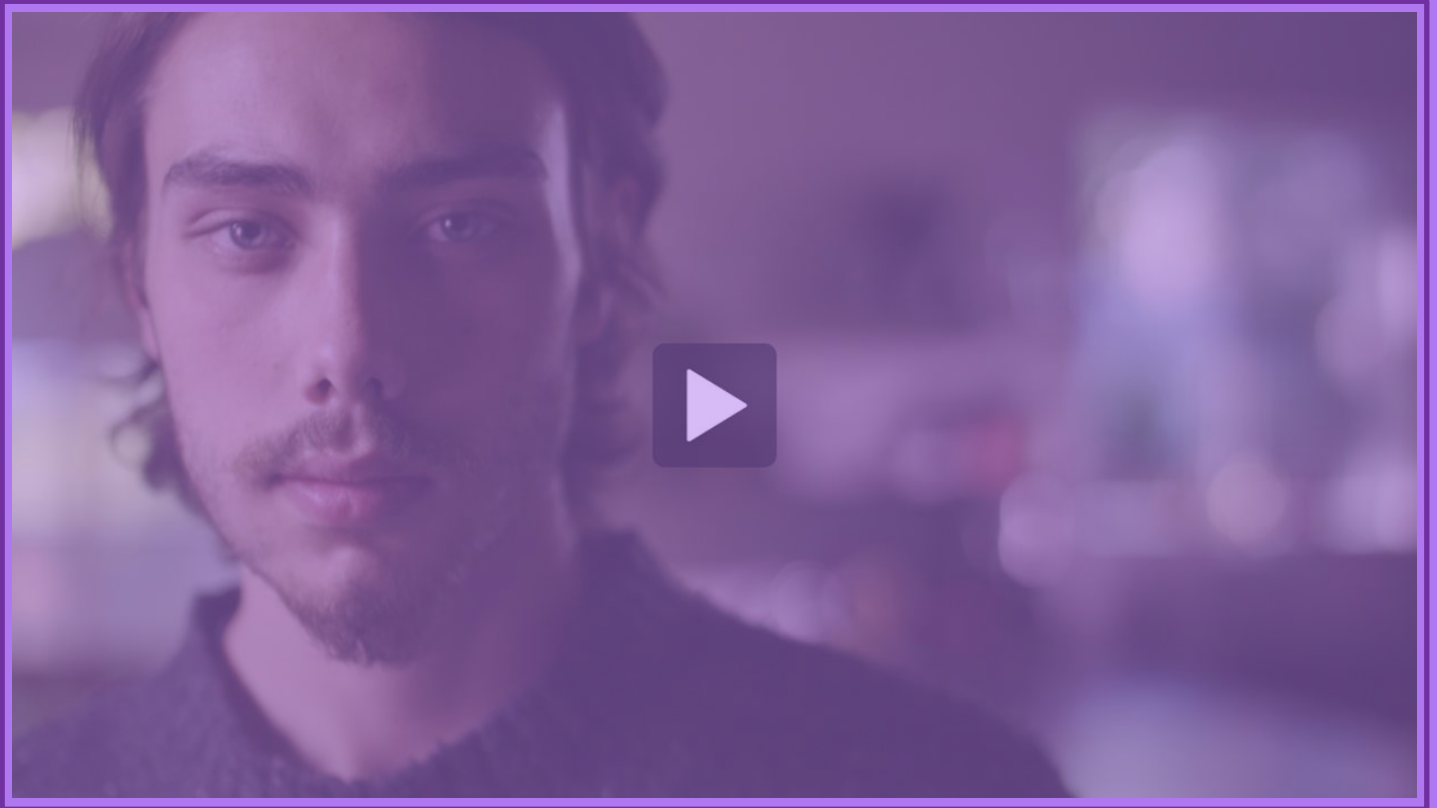
On average, **22 people die and 17 are hospitalized every day** due to opioid-related harms.

On average **5x more people** in Canada die per day from an opioid overdose compared to car accidents.

Here is a real-life story that shows the importance of knowing the risks and facts of opioids.

## We present to you Etienne's story

Please note that the following video may contain sensitive content.



# Etienne's Story



# What Are Opioids?

- Opioids are medications or drugs used to treat pain.
- Since opioids can also induce euphoria (feeling high), which gives them the potential to be used improperly.
- Opioids can be prescribed medications:
  - codeine
  - fentanyl
  - morphine
  - oxycodone
  - Hydromorphone
  - medical heroin
- Opioids can also be produced or obtained illegally.



**If you have been prescribed an opioid medicine, it should:**

- only be taken as prescribed
- never be used by someone for whom it was not prescribed
- never be taken with alcohol or other medications (except as prescribed)

**Keep your medication safe to help prevent use by others by:**

- never sharing your medication with anyone else. This is illegal and may also cause serious harm or death to the other person
- keeping track of the number of pills remaining in a package
- storing opioids in a safe and secure place

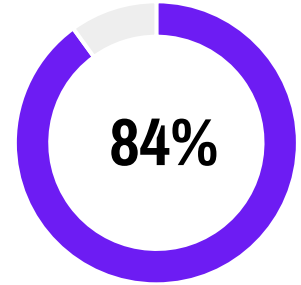
# The Overdose Crisis

Canada is currently experiencing an **overdose crisis**. The biggest cause of opioid-related deaths right now is that illegal opioids are much stronger than they used to be and other drugs are being mixed with strong opioids, sometimes without people knowing.



**40,642+**

Over 40,642 people are estimated to have **died from an opioid-related overdose** in Canada between January 2016 and June 2023.



Of all accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths so far in 2023 (January-June), 84% involved fentanyl.



# What is Fentanyl?

- Fentanyl is a man-made opioid which is a powerful pain reliever.
- It's usually used in hospitals, but a doctor can also prescribe it to control severe pain.
- It exists as a legal prescription medication, but can also be produced and sold illegally, which is extremely dangerous because of how strong it is.



# What Makes Fentanyl So Dangerous?

## Fentanyl is a dangerous drug because:

- It is **20 to 40 times** more potent than heroin and **100 times** more potent than morphine. This makes the risk of accidental overdose very high.
- You can't **see, taste, or smell** fentanyl which makes it hard to detect.
- It can be **mixed with other drugs** such as heroin and cocaine. It is also being found in counterfeit pills that are made to look like prescription opioids.



# Illegal Fentanyl

Fentanyl is becoming more and more **common** in illegal drugs because it is not only cheaper and easier to make, but it's more powerful even in a small amount.

Some street drugs (like cocaine and meth) are being **contaminated** with fentanyl, which is causing an **increased risk** of overdose death. Sometimes this is happening by accident when different types of illegal drugs are being created/packaged in the same place.

People who make illegal drugs may **not control** how much fentanyl goes in, causing street drugs to be increasingly dangerous.

# Toxic Drug Supply

When taking illegal drugs, it's **impossible** to know exactly what you are taking. Common illegal drugs are being **increasingly** contaminated with strong opioids like fentanyl. You can't see, taste or smell fentanyl, and **a few grains** can be enough to **kill** the average person. Overdoses are happening to people who **didn't** realize they took an opioid.

**Never** take a substance when you don't know what's in it. **A** small amount of fentanyl could be enough to kill you.

**Knowing the risks** and how to **reduce** them could **save your or someone else's life**.



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Thank you for completing Part One of the  
Know More Opioids self-led learning experience!

We recommend you continue to Part Two!

# KNOW MORE

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Know More Opioids Self-Led Learning Experience | Part Two

# Opioid Overdose

- An overdose can happen when you take too much of an opioid. Opioids affect the part of your brain that controls your breathing. When you take more opioids than your body can handle, your breathing slows. This can lead to unconsciousness and even death.
- Anyone using prescribed or illegal opioids can have an overdose, but some factors put you at risk, including:
  - Taking prescription opioids more often or at higher doses than recommended.
  - Mixing opioids with alcohol or other drugs.
  - Taking a higher dose of an opioid your body isn't used to.
  - Taking any illegal drugs as you don't know what it is in it.

# Signs Of An Opioid Overdose

**You could help you save a life.**

Recognize the signs and symptoms of an overdose, including:

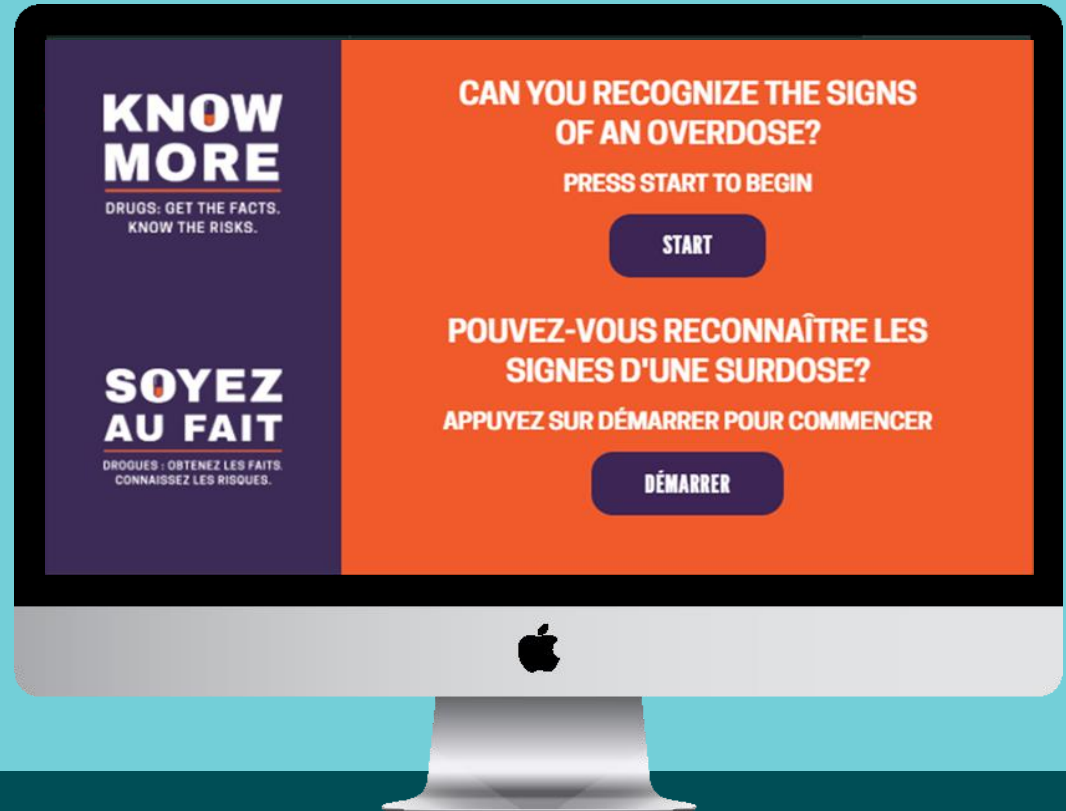
- difficulty walking, talking, staying awake
- blue or grey lips or nails
- very small pupils
- cold and clammy skin
- dizziness and confusion
- extreme drowsiness
- choking, gurgling or snoring sounds
- slow, weak or no breathing
- inability to wake up, even when shaken or shouted at





# ACTIVITY: Signs Of An Overdose

Know the signs of an opioid overdose and learn what to do.



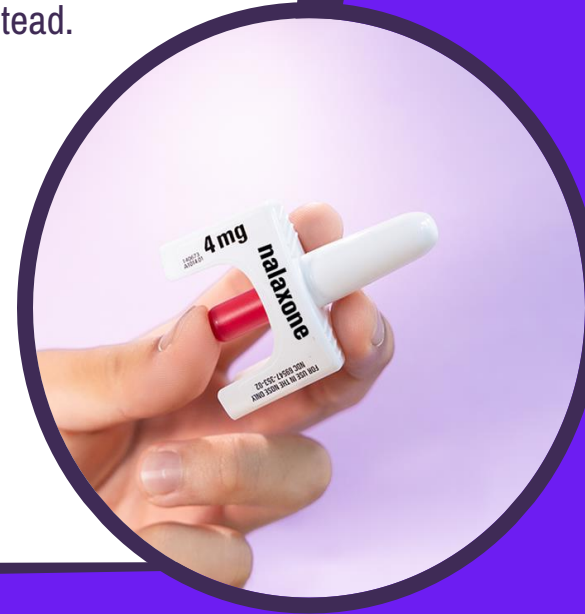
# What is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a fast-acting drug used to temporarily reverse the effects of opioid overdoses.

Naloxone can restore breathing within 2 to 5 minutes. When you take an opioid, it affects certain receptors in your brain. Naloxone works by kicking opioids off the receptors in your brain and binding to those receptors instead. This temporarily reverses or blocks the effects of opioids on your body.

Naloxone only works if you have opioids in your system, such as:

- fentanyl
- heroin
- morphine
- codeine



# What is Naloxone?

Naloxone only works temporarily.

Naloxone is only active in the body for 20 to 90 minutes, the effects of most opioids last longer. This means that the effects of naloxone are likely to wear off before the opioids are gone from the body, which causes the breathing to stop again. So, it is important to seek further medical attention.

Naloxone may need to be used again, depending on the amount or type of opioid taken, or how the opioids were taken (for example: oral, injection).

# What is Naloxone?

Naloxone is safe for all ages.

It only works if you have opioids in your system. You cannot use naloxone improperly. You cannot develop an addiction to naloxone. Naloxone does not give a high feeling and it is only used to reverse an opioid overdose.

Even if in doubt, always give naloxone. It has no side effects and it is safe to give to someone even if the person did not take an opioid.



In Canada, two types of take-home kits are available:

**1**

**Naloxone nasal spray is sprayed directly into the nose, where it is absorbed.**

It starts to take effect in 2 to 3 minutes.



**Naloxone kits have successfully reversed thousands of overdoses across Canada.**

# 2

Naloxone injectable is injected into any muscle in the body, such as the arm or thigh.

It starts to take effect in 2 to 3 minutes.



Naloxone kits have successfully reversed thousands of overdoses across Canada.

# Where to Get Naloxone?

Where to get Naloxone?

Naloxone is available at most pharmacies without a prescription. Some provinces offer take-home naloxone kits for free.

Check your provincial health sites or [Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca) to see where these kits are available.



# The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act

- In case of an **overdose**, the **number one** priority is saving that life, **immediately call 911** or your local emergency number and wait with the victim until help arrives.
- Administer Naloxone if you have it.
- **Stay on the scene** to help the person.
- When you call for emergency help during an overdose, Canada's Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act **provides you some legal protection**. You **will not get in trouble** if you are high or have drugs around if you are calling to save someone else's life.
- The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act protects you from:
  - Simple drug possession charges.
  - Violation of conditions regarding simple possession in: pre-trial release, conditional sentence, probation orders, parole.

## Know the Signs of an Opioid Overdose



Blue or grey lips or nails



Dizziness and confusion



Can't be woken up



Choking, gurgling or snoring sounds



Slow, weak or no breathing



Drowsiness or difficulty staying awake

## Suspect an Overdose?

CALL **911** or your local emergency number

Administer **naloxone** if you have it

**Stay** with the person until help arrives

You have the power to save a life.

Learn more at [Canada.ca/Opioids](https://Canada.ca/Opioids)  
Together we can #StopOverdoses



## Saving a life is the number one priority during an overdose

Even if you've taken drugs or have some on you, The *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* protects you from:

- Simple drug possession charges
- Violation of conditions regarding simple possession in:
  - pre-trial release | conditional sentences | probation orders | parole

**This law applies to the person who has overdosed, the person who seeks help and anyone at the scene when help arrives.**



# Activity: Time is of the Essence

Test your knowledge about Naloxone and the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act*. Click on continue.



# Addiction

- When someone is affected by addiction, they crave the drug and continue using it despite its harmful effects. The drug becomes the focus of their feelings, thoughts, and activities.
- Addiction causes changes to your brain that makes it extremely hard to stop using the drug, even if someone wants to. This is because the body gets used to a regular supply of the drug, but the good news is that people can get help and recover.



# Addiction

- If someone has developed a drug addiction, and stops taking it or lowers their dosage quickly, they may experience withdrawal symptoms. (Chills/Sweating, Diarrhea/Nausea/Stomach Pain, Insomnia, Body Ache/Widespread or Increased Pain)
- The severity of withdrawal and its duration depends upon:
  - How much drug was taken
  - Which drug was used and
  - How long the drug was used for



# Addiction

There is support available to help someone with substance use and addiction.

**Addiction is not a choice,  
and recovery is possible.**



# Key Points to Remember

- **Opioids** are drugs with pain-relieving properties that are used primarily to **treat pain**.
- If you are prescribed an opioid, **always** follow the instructions of your doctor.
- Fentanyl is one of the **most powerful opioids**.
- Fentanyl **can be prescribed** but can also be **made and sold illegally** and mixed with other street drugs. A small amount can kill you.
- Around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of opioid-related deaths **involve fentanyl**.
- **Know the signs** of an opioid overdose.
- Naloxone **temporarily reverses** an opioid overdose and you can get it for **free at most pharmacies** in Canada.
- If you witness an overdose, **call 911**, stay and give naloxone if you have it.
- Even if you have taken drugs or have some on you, the **Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act** provides some legal protection if you stay and call 911.



# Resources

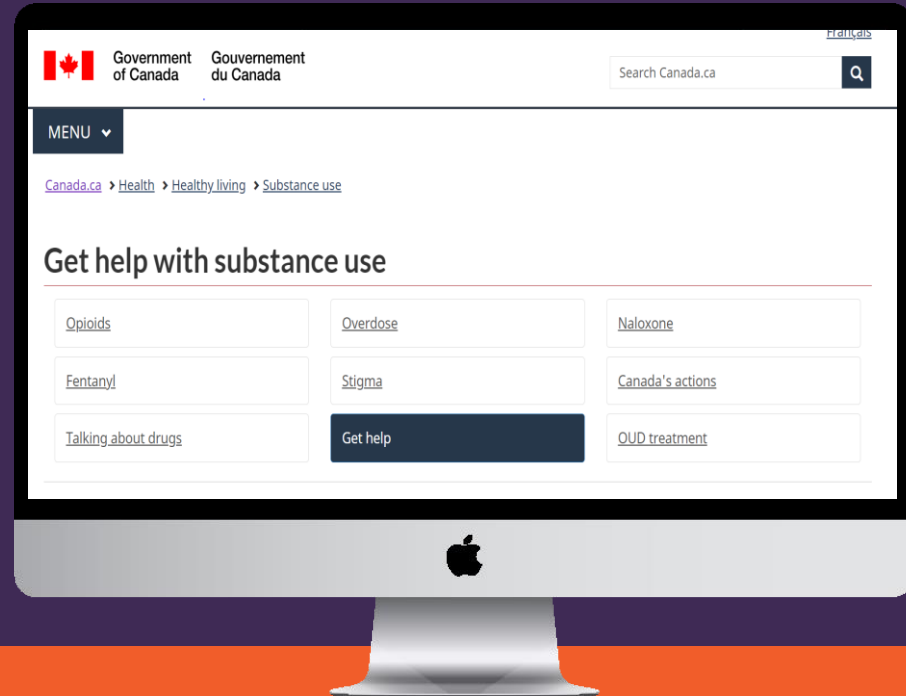
[www.healthcanadaexperiences.ca](http://www.healthcanadaexperiences.ca)

On the site, you will find:

- Information about the *KNOW MORE Opioids experience* and other experiences
- Digital activities
- Additional resources

It's hard to stop using substances, even when you want to. Help is available. Visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/get-help-with-substance-use.html>

If you or someone you know is thinking of suicide, call or text 9-8-8.

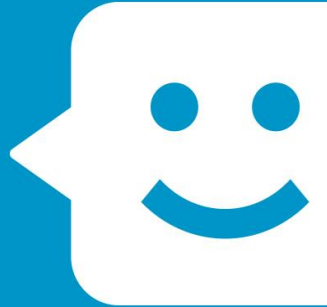


# Additional Resources

**Need someone to talk to?**

Please visit: Kids Help Phone

**Whenever you  
need to talk,  
we're open.**



 Text 686868

 KidsHelpPhone.ca

 Call 1-800-668-6868

Kids Help Phone 



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