



December 9, 2017 (fifth public communication)

Key messages:

- There have been 55 incidents of serious and potentially-life threatening drug-related intoxications in Eeyou Istchee since August 1<sup>st</sup> 2017
- There is no indication of opioid or fentanyl contamination of drugs as yet, but we must remain vigilant
- Street drugs can be dangerous as they are often mixed with unknown substances or contaminated without people's knowledge
- Drug-consumption, and particularly bingeing and mixing drugs, can increase the risk of intoxication and death
- Even substances such as alcohol, cocaine or cannabis that are not contaminated, can still be very harmful if consumed in large quantities
- If you or someone you know is experiencing an overdose, or feels unwell or unusual after using alcohol or drugs (e.g. confusion, breathing problems, difficulty staying awake, etc.) call emergency services right away

- The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) wishes to provide this update concerning incidents linked to drug intoxication in many of our communities in recent months.
- Drug intoxication is an important issue across Canada with a rise in recent years of overdose-related deaths due to excess drug consumption as well as contaminated drugs.
- Since the last communication was issued in October 2017, based on the information we have gathered so far, we have the following updates:
  - o The current situation in Eeyou Istchee:
    - From August 1<sup>st</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup> 2017 there have been a total of 55 incidents of severe intoxication reported to the Public Health Department of the Cree Health Board. These numbers are likely to be an underestimate of the total number of drug-related health problems, as we are only requesting reports on incidents that are the most serious and potentially-life threatening. The 55 incidents reported include 21 incidents in August, another 21 incidents in September, 8 incidents in October and 5 incidents in November. In total, there were 42 people who were involved in a single incident of intoxication, and 6 people who had more than one intoxication reported during the 4-month period. Intoxications occur in both men and women, mostly among youth ages 15-29 years old. The most commonly involved substances include alcohol, cannabis and cocaine, and to a lesser extent sedatives and amphetamines (e.g. speed).
    - There is **no evidence** that there have been any intoxications in Eeyou Istchee related to consuming drugs, such as heroin or cocaine, that have been contaminated by fentanyl, but we must remain vigilant.
    - While the vast majority of intoxications in Eeyou Istchee do not appear to be opioid-related, if contaminated drugs should enter the region, and particularly cocaine



contaminated with fentanyl, this could rapidly lead to an increase in opioid-related intoxications and even deaths. Any drugs can become contaminated by fentanyl, so one must be cautious.

- Even in the absence of opioid-related intoxications, and even though the number of intoxications appears to have decreased in October and November (possibly due to people returning to work/school after the summer, or being out in the bush over moose break), health workers are still very concerned about people suffering from serious adverse reactions following drug consumption including decreased levels of consciousness, psychotic episodes and severe agitation. Many patients require urgent transfer to hospital due to alcohol poisoning or other types of non-opioid street drug exposure, and there have also been a small number of deaths.
- Drug-consumption, and particularly bingeing and mixing drugs, can increase the risk of intoxication and even death. Street drugs often include mixtures of a variety of substances, many of which can be harmful and produce unintended reactions.
- The current situation in the rest of Quebec:
  - A recent report shows that there has been an increase in opioid-related deaths in Quebec in the last decade ([www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/2298](http://www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/2298))
  - According to an alert issued by the Montreal Public Health Department on Sept 1, 2017, there has been an increase in intoxications and deaths likely related to an increase in heroin, and also cocaine, contaminated by fentanyl.
  - Since the end of November, there is a province-wide effort to prevent intoxications and deaths, particularly related to fentanyl and other opioids

What can you do to keep yourself and people that you know safe:

- The Public Health Department recommends that community members reduce the amount that they consume or refrain from consuming drugs at all. However, if you do consume drugs, keep in mind the following points to take care of yourself and your friends:
  - Don't use alone. Make a plan and tell a buddy who can call for help, if needed
  - Know your tolerance. If you are sick or had a time of abstinence or reduced use, use much less
  - Don't mix drugs - don't mix drugs with other drugs, with alcohol or with prescribed medications
  - Street drugs often contain unknown or illicit substances that can cause serious health problems and even lead to coma, hospitalization and death. Whether you are in the community or in an urban area, you cannot know what is in the drug you are taking, so if you do use, test a small amount first and go slow
  - Call emergency services right away if someone overdoses, or feels unwell or unusual after using alcohol or drugs (e.g. confusion, breathing problems, difficulty staying awake, etc.)
- The CBHSSJB and its Public Health Department will continue to work closely with the Community Miyupimaatisiun Centres (clinics), Chisasibi regional hospital, and other partners to better understand and respond to this evolving situation. We will continue to keep you updated on an ongoing basis.
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