

Joint news release with Yukon Coroner's Services, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Yukon RCMP

March 11, 2021

Toxicology report means increase in opioid related overdose deaths

Toxicology reports have confirmed the presence of carfentanil in the most recent drug overdose death in Yukon. The death occurred in late February, bringing the total number of deaths as a result of drug overdoses to five since mid-January 2021.

Three deaths were announced in mid-February with toxicology results still pending on a fourth death. All of those deaths occurred in the Whitehorse area. This most recent death involving carfentanil occurred in a rural Yukon community.

Carfentanil is approximately 100 times more toxic than fentanyl, 4000 times more potent than heroin and 10,000 times more toxic than morphine. It is not intended for human use and is deadly to humans in small amounts. Since 2016, Yukon has had a total of 37 confirmed opioid deaths, 29 of which involved fentanyl. In 2020, the Coroner's Service investigated 14 drug overdose deaths. Of these, 10 involved opioids, eight of which were fentanyl-based. These numbers are more than double those that were seen in 2019.

Quotes

The loss of another citizen to one more opioid overdose is heartbreaking. We must look beyond the numbers and see the impact the grief and loss is having on our communities. These are our family members, our friends and our colleagues. Real change is needed to prevent future deaths. Carfentanil is toxic and clearly not intended for use in any product that humans should be consuming. This is what is so very frightening about illicit drug use – an individual can never be certain what is in the product they are using.

– Yukon Chief Coroner, Heather Jones

In addition to pandemic stresses, this is an extremely dangerous time to be using illegal drugs. We need to continue to work with our partners to make people aware, connect people to supports, take-home naloxone and to treatment, and to explore potential new directions in harm reduction such as safe drug supply and supervised consumption.

– Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Brendan Hanley

The opioid crisis will continue to impact Yukon until such time as the illicit drug market is eliminated. While Law Enforcement plays a key role in deterring such activity, the root causes of substance abuse will still need to be addressed in a meaningful way through education, health support and, potentially, safe supply.

-Chief Superintendent and Commanding Officer of Yukon RCMP, Scott O. Sheppard