

**Yukon
Coroner's
Service**

News Release

Chief Coroner confirms that toxic illicit drugs continue to take lives in the Yukon

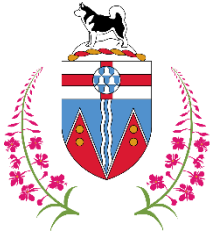
January 26, 2024 – Since mid-January of 2024, the Yukon Coroner's Service has been investigating three deaths that are suspected to be the result of recent use of toxic illicit drugs. Toxicology results are pending on all three cases; however, evidence confirms that substance use contributed to these deaths. Deaths suspected to be the result of illicit substance use represent over 40 per cent of those reported to the Yukon Coroner's Service since January 1, 2024. These deaths, while unrelated to each other, may have been preventable.

In 2023, there were a total of 23 substance use related deaths – compared to 24 investigated in 2022 – with 20 of these involving opioids. 19 of those involved fentanyl, which is consistent with what we investigated in 2022. These deaths represent 23 per cent of all cases investigated by the Yukon Coroner's Service in 2023. Cocaine was found in 21 of these cases and alcohol continues to be a factor in many of the deaths. Benzodiazapines were seen into August of 2023, and flurofentanyl was seen beginning in October and consistently in deaths to the end of the year. 22 of these deaths occurred in Whitehorse. What these findings show is that the source of these illicit drugs is inconsistent, and Yukoners need to be incredibly careful when they choose to use.

Out of the 20 deaths in 2023 involving opioids:

- 13 were male;
- 14 identified as First Nation;
- 19 occurred in Whitehorse; and
- Ages ranged from early 20s to mid-60s, with people in their 30s being most profoundly affected.

The challenges, concerns, and heartbreak caused by toxic drug supply continues to be faced by shattered families and communities, affecting all Yukoners throughout the territory. This substance use health emergency continues to ravage our territory, and we cannot lose sight of the continuing impacts.



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Quote:

I am urging all Yukoners to remain aware of the substance use health emergency we continue to be faced with, and to take steps to address this with urgency. The impact of the pain and grief of the families and friends of those who have lost their lives continues to be felt deeply. We know that these deaths are preventable, and now as the devastation continues, we need to support one another in this crisis.

I am once again asking all Yukoners to demonstrate kindness and compassion for those who are struggling and for those who are grieving the lives lost.

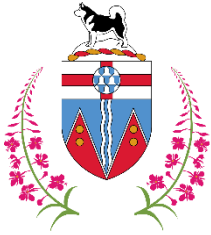
The Yukon Coroner's Service continues to send our deep condolences and support to the families and communities who have been so unfathomably impacted by these deaths.

Chief Coroner Heather Jones

Contact: For media inquiries contact the chief coroner [email heather.jones@yukon.ca, or phone 867-667-5317; toll free 1-800-661-0408, extension 5317].

RESOURCES

Please do not use alone - if you're by yourself and using, call the National Overdose Response Service (NORS) at 1-888-688-NORS (6677). We also encourage people to test any drugs before consumption using the drug checking services available from Blood Ties Four Directions, the Outreach Van, and Emergency Medical Services. Make sure to communicate with a friend about what substances you are using, and ensure they know who to call for help in an emergency. All Yukoners can take steps to address this crisis together, and we urge them to do so. Naloxone is a free, safe and effective way to reverse opioid overdose – for more information on how to obtain a naloxone kit, please visit Yukon.ca. This is a simple measure that all citizens and business owners can take to prevent fatal overdoses and you can find it in many places in the Yukon.



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The Department of Health and Social Services continues to provide Opioid Treatment Services, including safer supply. Yukoners can call 867-668-2552 and self-refer for an appointment, which can often be scheduled the same day. Walk-ins for this service are also available. Opioid Treatment Services are provided at the Referred Care Clinic, Blood Ties Four Directions (Supervised Consumption Site), 405 Alexander, Housing First and Cornerstone.

If you are struggling with substance use, there is help available. Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services (MWSUS) offers Rapid Access Counselling (RAC) in person, virtually, or by phone from Monday to Friday. Secure an appointment within three business days by calling 867-456-3838 or toll-free at 1-866-456-3838. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) - Yukon Division provides Drop-in Counselling sessions, available in person, virtually, or over the phone from Monday to Saturday. Learn more at 867-668-6429. For immediate support, call the CMHA Yukon Reach Out Support Line. Available daily from 10 am to 2 am at 1-844-533-3030.

There are also mental health emergency contacts available:

9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline

Call or Text 9-8-8

Connect with trained counsellors for culturally sensitive support, empathy, and resources in any crisis, ensuring immediate help is always accessible.

Hope for Wellness

1-855-242-3310

Offers culturally sensitive support and counselling to Indigenous Peoples, promoting mental wellness and resilience.

24-Hour Residential School Survivor Crisis Line

1-866-925-4419

Provides immediate, sensitive support for residential school survivors and their families, recognizing the lasting impacts of intergenerational trauma.