

**Yukon  
Coroner's  
Service**

**News Release**

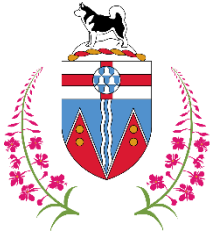
## **Toxic illicit drugs continue to be massive concern as Chief Coroner confirms recent deaths due to substance use**

**November 9, 2023** – The Yukon Coroner's Service confirms that four deaths in Whitehorse in October have been attributed to toxic illicit drugs. There is no obvious connection between these deaths. All these deaths involved cocaine and fentanyl; three in the form of the analog fluorofentanyl. Etizolam, a benzodiazepine, was detected in one of these deaths. These recent deaths have taken people between the ages of 24 and 52; all young people who have left the now too common gaps in our communities and in our families.

Fluorofentanyl is an analog of fentanyl, which has been found in toxicology reports more frequently in fatalities in British Columbia in late 2022 and throughout 2023. We are now seeing fluorofentanyl-caused or -related deaths occurring in the Yukon. Fluorofentanyl is approximately half as potent as fentanyl and therefore requires twice as much to get the same effect as fentanyl. Toxicological analysis cannot determine if the fentanyl is added to the cocaine – or vice versa – or if the two drugs were taken at different times within hours of the death. What we do know is that the combination is proving to be lethal. Toxic illicit drugs are increasingly a massive concern here in the Yukon, and the drug supply continues to be unsafe and deadly.

Between January 1 and November 1, 2023, there have been a total of 18 substance use related deaths, with 16 of these involving opioids. All but one had fentanyl in their system.

It is heartbreaking for the territory's Coroner's Service to report that the Yukon has now recorded 93 residents who have lost their lives to opioids since April of 2016. 83 of those 93 deaths (89 per cent) involved fentanyl.



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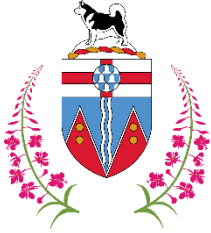
Toxic drug supplies are continuing to take the lives of our loved ones, causing irreparable harm to our communities. No part of our society is unaffected, and all walks of life are impacted by these tragic deaths.

Now more than ever, Yukoners need to be incredibly careful if they choose to use. Please do not use alone. If you are struggling with substance use, there is help available. Anyone can call 1-866-456-3838 to get connected to a counsellor through Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services – this is available to all Yukoners. 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.

Naloxone is a safe and effective way to reverse opioid overdose – for more information on how to obtain a naloxone kit, please visit [Yukon.ca](http://Yukon.ca). This is a simple measure that all citizens and business owners can take to prevent fatal overdoses.

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.

It is crucial that we all work together to address this crisis, supporting one another as we continue to take steps through the Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy, declared in January 2022.



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### **Quote:**

*What the Yukon continues to see with substance use related deaths is shockingly difficult. Communities are struggling with the grief and pain associated with the loss of life due to toxic illicit drugs. Every life is a valued part of our communities, and we are losing far too many to these preventable deaths. The heartbreak is unbearable, and these are wounds that never fully heal for those who are left behind.*

*I am 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](mailto:heather.jones@yukon.ca), or phone 867-667-5317; toll free 1-800-661-0408, extension 5317].