

Update from Chief Coroner regarding opioid deaths

The Yukon Coroner's Service (YCS) can now confirm that 24 opioid-related deaths took place in 2021 and that 67 opioid-related deaths have occurred in the Yukon since April of 2016. These deaths were preventable and our communities continue to struggle with the grief and pain associated with the loss of life from the substance use health crisis.

We are now able to provide further information on these 24 tragic deaths that occurred in 2021:

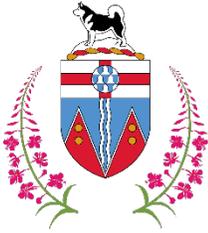
- 20 of these deaths, or 83 per cent, occurred in Whitehorse;
- 16, or 67 per cent, were male and eight, or 33 per cent, were female;
- 14, or 58 per cent, were non First Nation citizens and 10 or 42 per cent were First Nations citizens.
- ages ranged from 23-60, with the average age being 44;
- benzodiazapines, or "benzos" have been confirmed in six cases;
- cocaine has been confirmed in 17 cases;
- fentanyl has been involved in all cases; and
- carfentanil has been involved in two cases;

These deaths represent 20% of all cases investigated by YCS in 2021.

Between January 5 and February 22, 2022, the YCS can confirm nine opioid-related deaths and a tenth death that is awaiting full toxicological analysis.

Further information is provided below on the ten deaths that occurred in 2022:

- eight, or 80 per cent, of these deaths occurred in Whitehorse;
- five were female and five were male;
- seven, or 70 per cent, were First Nations citizens and 3, or 30 per cent, were non First Nations citizens;
- ages ranged from 26-56, with an average age of 32;
- benzodiazapines have been confirmed in three cases;
- cocaine has been confirmed in five cases; and



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- fentanyl has been confirmed in all nine confirmed cases; the tenth case is pending.

These deaths represent 40 per cent of all cases investigated by YCS since January 2022.

The YCS is beginning to see more First Nations citizens being affected, as well as more women and people in younger age groups. Alcohol remains a factor in many cases.

Toxic drug supplies [illicit opioids] are continuing to take the lives of our loved ones and cause irreparable harm to our communities. No part of our society is unaffected; all Yukoners can take steps to address this, and we urge them to do so.

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. This is a simple measure that all citizens and business owners can take to prevent fatal overdoses.

Since the substance use health crisis was declared on January 20, 2022, hours at the safe consumption site in Whitehorse have increased, as have emergency measures and emergency medical services staff at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

Further, the Government of Yukon is working on an opioid action plan and will be holding focus groups to discuss viable solutions for the territory.

Quote:

What the Yukon is experiencing is astonishingly difficult. We must show kindness, wisdom and compassion to those struggling with substance use, and work to support each other as we grieve.

The Yukon Coroner's Service continues to send our deep condolences and support to the families and communities who have been so deeply 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].