

Illicit Fatal Drug Overdoses in British Columbia

Questions and Answers

1. What is being released today?

On November 13, 2018, Statistics Canada is releasing information on the results of a project with the BC Coroners Service and the City of Surrey regarding illicit drug overdose deaths.

2. What is the purpose of this project?

- The results and data generated by the project will be key to identifying the primary risk factors related to opioid overdoses. It will also create a better understanding of the characteristics of those individuals most at risk of opioid use or overdose.
- The data generated from the project will also assist Statistics Canada's partners in identifying potential multi-sectoral interventions by informing evidence-based decision-making and effective policy review. The work will allow for the development of programs which bring together service providers and front line public health and public safety professionals to provide timely supports to people at higher risk for overdose.

3. Why did you focus just on the City of Surrey?

- Within the province of British Columbia, the City of Surrey has among the largest number of deaths in the province due to the overdose crisis, and this continues to persist, according to the B.C. Coroners Service.
- While the project focusses on data for the city of Surrey, a successful demonstration project at the local level will serve as a model for the province and rest of the country. A second phase of the project would consist of developing a platform and conducting consultations to expand the project to other municipalities that have also been significantly impacted by the opioid crisis.

4. Which organizations did Statistics Canada collaborate partner with on this project?

- Statistics Canada worked in partnership with the BC Coroners Service, City of Surrey, Surrey Fire Service, Surrey RCMP Detachment, Fraser Health Authority, BC Stats, the BC Centre for Disease Control, BC Ministry of Health, and Public Safety Canada.

5. How did you find the data for this project?

- This study is based on data collected from the BC Coroners Service, integrated with administrative data from Statistics Canada's Social Data Linkage Environment (*SDLE*). This data includes employment, tax, immigration, Census, and health data. The project brought together existing federal, provincial and municipal data from British Columbia and the city of Surrey.

- Subsequent phases of the project will look at data collected from the BC Ministry of Health (Pharmanet, Medical services plan, and mental health), the BC Centre for Disease Control (Emergency Health Services), the Surrey Fire Service, and the Surrey RCMP.

6. What is the SDLE? Isn't this an invasion of privacy?

- Statistics Canada's Social Data Linkage Environment (SDLE) is a highly secure environment that facilitates the creation of linked population data files for pan-Canadian social and economic analysis. It is **not** a large integrated data base.
- The SDLE promotes the innovative use of existing administrative and survey data to address important research questions and inform socio-economic policy through record linkage. It expands the potential of data integration across multiple domains, such as health, justice, education and income, through the creation of linked analytical data files without the need to collect additional data from Canadians.
- For more information on the SDLE environment, please visit www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/sdle

7. What are opioids?

- Opioids are drugs with pain relieving properties that are used primarily to treat pain. Opioids can also induce euphoria ("feeling high"), which gives them the potential to be used improperly. They can be prescribed medications such as codeine, fentanyl, morphine, oxycodone, hydromorphone, and medical heroin. Opioids can also be produced or obtained illegally.
- For more information on opioids, please visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/problematic-prescription-drug-use/opioids.html>

8. What are illicit drugs?

- Illicit drugs can refer to a variety of drugs, including: street drugs, including, but not limited to, controlled and illegal drugs such heroin, cocaine, MDMA, methamphetamine, illicit fentanyl; medications not prescribed to an individual but obtained or purchased on the street from unknown means or origins; and, combinations of the above with prescribed medications.

9. Is this really a crisis? I hear that word in the media all the time.

- In November 2016, as co-chairs of the national Opioid Summit, the Federal Minister of Health, and the Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, released a Joint Statement of Action to Address the Opioid Crisis, reflecting a combined commitment to act on Canada's serious and growing opioid crisis. (Joint Statement of Action to Address the Opioid Crisis, 2018)

- Given the steady rise in opioid-related drug overdoses and related deaths, British Columbia's provincial health officer declared a public health emergency in April of 2016.
- This is a real crisis.

10. What should we do about the opioid crisis? Why is the crisis happening?

- As the national statistical office, Statistics Canada's role is to serve Canada with high-quality statistical information that matters, to inform action policy and program development. It is outside our mandate to evaluate policy.
- Representatives from our project partners in BC would be best positioned to respond to your questions concerning program and policy development.
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