

A close-up photograph of a man with curly brown hair and a light beard, wearing a blue sweater, smiling warmly at a young boy whose profile is visible on the left. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

# LET'S TALK

SPEAKING WITH OUR KIDS ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE

[WWW.VIHA.CA/MHO/OVERDOSE](http://WWW.VIHA.CA/MHO/OVERDOSE)  
AN INFORMATION KIT FOR SCHOOLS AND PARENTS



# INTRO

In April 2016, BC's Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, declared a **public health emergency** related to the opioid overdose crisis in the province. This declaration followed several years of increasing rates of both fatal and non-fatal overdoses—related in large part to the addition of fentanyl in illicit opioids, including heroin and fake oxycontin pills.

In 2016, there were approximately 914 overdose fatalities in BC, with 12 occurring in youth under the age of 19 years old, accounting for approximately 1% of the continued crisis. The primary impact of this crisis is among people between 20—59 years of age (95%) and the majority have been males (80%).

**CURRENT SITUATION:** The overdose crisis continues to worsen in BC, due to the presence of fentanyl and fentanyl-alternatives in illicit drugs, including: heroin and other opioids, cocaine and crystal methamphetamine. Historically, these are not substances commonly used by youth, with rates of use remaining static at less than 5% of the youth population.<sup>1</sup>

While overdose occurrences remain low in youth, it is a timely opportunity for parents, teachers and positive members of community to provide education and early intervention to prevent harm.

**THIS DOCUMENT:** The resources offered in this document will create a consistent understanding of the opioid overdose emergency, including a factual description of what fentanyl and fentanyl-analogues are, the risks they pose when used illicitly, as well as information on overdose prevention, recognition and response.

There are links to learn about naloxone and the Take Home Naloxone (THN) program, along with videos and local resources on Vancouver Island. Lastly, there are resources to support caregivers, parents and teachers on how best to keep youth close and connected in their day-to-day lives.

In this school information kit, you will find

- Facts on fentanyl, overdoses and naloxone
- How to talk to youth about drug use
- How to support students who may have experienced trauma as the result of exposure to overdoses, or who may be triggered by information concerning drug use or the overdose crisis
- Social media and downloadable material
- Online resources and supports

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1. McCreary Centre Society, *2013 Adolescent Health Survey*. [http://www.mcs.bc.ca/2013\\_AHS\\_Reports](http://www.mcs.bc.ca/2013_AHS_Reports)

# FACTS

**WHAT IS FENTANYL?** Fentanyl is a synthetic opiate narcotic. It is roughly 50 to 100 times more toxic than morphine. Heroin, cocaine, oxycodone and other drugs can be cut with fentanyl, in powder, liquid or pill form. It often comes in similar packaging. If you are a new drug user, you are particularly at risk should you use drugs cut with fentanyl. You can't see it, smell it or taste it, but if your drug of choice is cut with fentanyl, it can kill you regardless if you inject it, snort it or smoke it.

(Read more at: <https://knowyoursource.ca>)

**WHAT IS NALOXONE AND HOW CAN I ACCESS IT?** Naloxone (pronounced "nah-LOX-own") is an easy-to-use, lifesaving antidote to an overdose from opioids. Used in hospitals for decades, naloxone has no abuse potential and can be administered with basic training.

(To find out more about naloxone and BC's Take Home Naloxone program watch the video *Naloxone Wakes You Up* at <https://vimeo.com/180116125>)

**HOW DO I RECOGNIZE/RESPOND TO AN OVERDOSE?** Early overdose signs include: severe sleepiness; slow heartbeat; trouble breathing; slow, shallow breathing or snoring; cold, clammy skin and trouble walking or talking. The *Overdose Survival Guide: Tips to Save a Life* provides emergency information that teaches readers how to prevent overdose, recognize the signs of an overdose, and what to do when one occurs.

(Find it at: <https://towardtheheart.com/naloxone/news/overdose-survival-guide>)

**WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?** Harm reduction includes programs and practices that aim to keep people safe and minimize death, disease and injury from high risk behaviour. Harm reduction for drug use involves a range of support services and strategies to make it as easy as possible for people who use substances to get help, at any stage of their substance use. These services aim to involve people in their own health by keeping them connected to the health system—empowering them to improve the quality of their lives.

(Visit: [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/substance-use-harm-reduction](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/substance-use-harm-reduction))

**WHAT DO I DO IF I FIND A NEEDLE ON SCHOOL PROPERTY?**

Anyone who uses a needle to inject should dispose of it safely. However, that is not always the case, and sometimes discarded needles are found in public areas. Students should not touch discarded needles or drug paraphernalia, and should let a teacher or adult know.

(Download Island Health's brochure *Safe Disposal of Needles and Drug Paraphernalia* at [www.viha.ca/mhas/resources](http://www.viha.ca/mhas/resources))

**WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT IN MY COMMUNITY?**

Find harm reduction sites and services in your community at: <https://towardtheheart.com>.



## TALKING TO YOUTH ABOUT DRUG USE

While it's never too early or too late to talk about substance use with your kids, the recent rash of fentanyl related incidents is a reminder of just how important this conversation is. It may be tempting to focus on stats and fears, however research shows scare-based, lecture-like tactics don't work and may actually lead to a loss of trust and reduce opportunities for good conversations.

Talk openly with kids from an early age about all drugs—including prescription drugs, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine and illicit drugs—to help them to understand what they are. As children become young adults, help them make healthy choices by maintaining good relationships and having conversations that encourage healthy behaviour. This includes conversations about their decisions around substance use, including alcohol, medications and other drugs.

### Some tips on how to start the conversation:

- **Know facts about the drug(s)** you plan to discuss in advance.
- **Understand and address your fears first.** Don't let irrational fears create undue anxiety while talking with your teen.
- **Approach the conversation** with a sense of curiosity and interest, rather than accusation and fear. Some experimentation is normal—discuss what that means and where to draw the line.
- **Ask them for their opinions** about what is happening. What do they think of the current crisis? How do they think they can address their own wellness and safety in the current context? Really listen, then discuss and address those issues together.
- **Focus on your concerns for their safety** and a deep regard for their wellness (versus right/wrong, good/bad, obey/punish).

Open conversations create trust, reduce fear and make it possible for us to learn from one another. ***Parenting: The Drugs Question***<sup>1</sup> provides more tips on how best to address substance use with your children.

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1. <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/hs-parents-list.pdf>



## PROVIDE A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Island Health encourages school staff to use a trauma-informed approach when discussing drug use and overdoses. This means recognizing and acknowledging trauma, and being aware and sensitive to its dynamics. Some youth may be more affected by these subjects than others.

Youth may have witnessed family members, friends or significant others using substances, or they may have used themselves. Youth who have suffered recent losses or who are coping with grief or toxic stress may also be triggered by overdose materials and education.

Teachers are experts in what is developmentally appropriate in educational settings. Here are some resources for schools to educate youth on sensitive issues in a trauma informed way that supports their mental health:

Alberta Education, the province's education ministry, has a video on **trauma in youth and how to provide trauma-informed education in schools**<sup>1</sup>.

The BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council has developed a **Trauma-Informed Practice Guide**<sup>2</sup>.

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1. <https://education.alberta.ca/trauma-informed-practice/what-is-trauma-informed-practice/everyone/trauma-informed-practice-video/>

2. [http://bccewh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013\\_TIP-Guide.pdf](http://bccewh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013_TIP-Guide.pdf)

Source info: [www.fraserhealth.ca](http://www.fraserhealth.ca)

# RESOURCES

Across Vancouver Island there is an array of community resources available to support youth, parents and families relative to substance use. These resources can play a valuable role in providing education, counseling support and more. In times of significant concern and distress, it can be helpful to have a safe and supportive service to host difficult discussions, explore the behavior/s of concern and prepare for potential changes determined by those involved.

We encourage you to share these resources with administrators and teachers, youth and families—and in your social media and school communications.

## #STOPOVERDOSE CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

The BC Government has launched a campaign for overdose prevention. There are various **campaign materials**<sup>1</sup> available for download, including social media posts, print and web ready material to share and use where appropriate.

## BROCHURES TO PRINT

Toward the Heart, a project of the Provincial Harm Reduction Program, offers an **Overdose Survival Guide**<sup>2</sup>, available for download in several languages.

Know Your Source, a Canadian overdose resource created in partnership with police and health authorities, has **overdose prevention posters**<sup>3</sup> available to download.

## EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS TO SHARE

Toward the Heart has a 12 minute educational video outlining the crisis and steps to take to prevent overdoses called **Naloxone Saves Lives**.<sup>4</sup>

The Resilience Research Centre has a short video about **Supporting Youth Resilience**.<sup>5</sup>

## OTHER RELIABLE RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

- Island Health offers resources and support around overdoses: [www.viha.ca/mho/overdose](http://www.viha.ca/mho/overdose)
- *Recognizing Resilience: A Workbook for Parents and Caregivers of Teens Involved with Substances* <http://keltymentalhealth.ca>
- Toward the Heart offers information on fentanyl and naloxone: <http://towardtheheart.com>
- Island Health's Discovery Youth and Family Substance Use Services: [www.viha.ca/youth-substance-use/discovery](http://www.viha.ca/youth-substance-use/discovery)
- BC Drug & Poison Information Centre hotline is 1-800-567-8911.
- HealthLink BC has overdose information and nurses available by calling 811 or [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca)
- Mindcheck is an online resource for youth and families offering mental health resources and support: <http://mindcheck.ca>
- Here to Help BC offers a *Resiliency Guide for Parents and Youth*: [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)
- *Keeping Youth Connected, Healthy & Learning* (For School Administrators): [www.viha.ca/NR/ronlyres/D37BC183-1B0E-4F0B-B949-5A8870A6049F/0/keepingyouthconnected.pdf](http://www.viha.ca/NR/ronlyres/D37BC183-1B0E-4F0B-B949-5A8870A6049F/0/keepingyouthconnected.pdf)

1. <http://www.viha.ca/mho/overdose.htm>

2. <https://towardtheheart.com/naloxone/siteresources/overdose-survival-guide>

3. <https://knowyoursource.ca/posters>

4. <https://player.vimeo.com/video/164669763>

5. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od5a20mXDw4&feature=share&list=UUYJ\\_SCKQbyKomR7EC2yYiw&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od5a20mXDw4&feature=share&list=UUYJ_SCKQbyKomR7EC2yYiw&index=1)