

Sharp increase in overdoses and presence of carfentanil in fentanyl mixtures in Montreal

The Direction régionale de santé publique du CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (DRSP de Montréal) has received a significant number of reports of non-fatal overdoses in recent days, linked to the presumed consumption of fentanyl. These overdoses required emergency interventions, including multiple ambulance transports. This marked increase in overdoses coincides with the detection of carfentanil in several samples presumed to be fentanyl, in the form of differently colored “rocks.” Medetomidine was also present in all cases.

Carfentanil is a highly toxic opioid effective at extremely low doses. It is uncommon to find it in fentanyl analyzed in Montreal. Medetomidine is a sedative analgesic used in veterinary medicine that has been circulating for several months in fentanyl mixtures.

This reinforces the importance for users not to use alone and for those accompanying them to have naloxone and know how to use it. Reducing usual doses is recommended, since even a minimal amount of carfentanil could trigger an overdose that could lead to death.

Regardless of the substance consumed, naloxone is indicated when a person :

- **Has difficulty breathing, makes a snore-like gurgling noise or is not breathing at all.**
- **Reacts minimally or not at all to noise and pain.**

The person may also present cyanosis (bluish lips and fingernails) and miosis (pinpoint pupils). These symptoms are likely to progress to **cardiorespiratory arrest**. In case of overdose, call 911 immediately for a rapid and effective intervention and administer naloxone if available. Hospital care may be required for naloxone administration under medical supervision or for airway management.

The DRSP de Montréal urges street-drug users to be cautious, **regardless of consumption method** (inhalation, injection, or other). It also encourages clinicians and care providers to increase overdose prevention interventions targeting users in the following ways:

1. Inform street drug users of the risks of consuming carfentanil unintentionally.

2. Provide counselling on safer drug use practices:

- **Avoid using alone** (or, notify someone and stay in contact when using, e.g. **National Overdose Response Service (NORS) 1-888-688-6677**, Remote Service for Overdose Prevention (**RSOP) 1-800-265-2626, option 2**).
- When several people are using, **avoid using all at the same time.**
 - o Make sure to stay with the person and provide regular stimulation in the hours that follow: the person must remain arousable at all times (snoring = warning sign).
- **Have naloxone available** in large enough quantities and know how to use it if someone shows signs of overdose. In case of doubt, don't hesitate to use it (naloxone is not dangerous even if it isn't necessary).
- **Reduce the dose of a drug to test its effects.**
- Use [supervised consumption services](#).
- Use [drug checking services](#). (Carfentanil may not be detected.)
- **Call 911** in the event of an overdose (the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* provides immunity from prosecution for simple possession to overdose witnesses who have called 911).

3. Provide information and support, as needed, to help people obtain free naloxone from pharmacies and community organizations listed in the [INSPQ directory](#).

We urge you to be vigilant and to inform us of any unusual situation by using the [fiche de signalement de surdose](#).

[Surdose | Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal \(santepubliquemontreal.ca\)](#)

Source: Direction régionale de santé publique du Montréal – CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal 514-528-2400