

Report of severe overdose linked to consumption of possibly contaminated street cannabis



On May 5, 2022, the Direction régionale de santé publique du CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (DRSP de Montréal) received a report of a case presenting signs and symptoms of opioid overdose with respiratory arrest. The person required several doses of naloxone and had to be hospitalized. This event occurred after the individual smoked cannabis bought on the street in the form of a greenish-brown bud (see photo). The event is still under investigation at this time.

In light of this situation, the street cannabis currently circulating may be contaminated with opioids. Opioids are associated with a high risk of death, especially for users who can be exposed unknowingly. A person overdosing on opioids may present the following symptoms: *extreme drowsiness, snoring, myosis (pinpoint pupils), difficulty breathing and cyanosis (blue lips and nails)*. The symptoms are likely to cause *cardiopulmonary arrest*.

Naloxone is needed to reverse overdose effects. In case of overdose, call 911 right away for rapid, effective intervention. Hospitalization may be required for naloxone administration under medical supervision or for airway management.

We urge you to be vigilant and to inform us of any situation suggesting possible street cannabis contamination with opioids, using the [Overdose Reporting Form](#).

https://santemontreal.qc.ca/fileadmin/fichiers/professionnels/DRSP/sujets-a-z/Surdoses/Alertes-outils/Fiche_Signalement_Surdose_vfinale_septembre2021.pdf

The DRSP urges street cannabis users to be careful, regardless of consumption method (ingestion, inhalation or other). Public health also encourages clinicians and care providers to enhance interventions to prevent deaths in this population:

1. Share information about the risks of severe overdose and death related to use of street cannabis.
2. Provide counselling on lower-risk drug use practices:
 - Recommend purchasing legal cannabis (known quality and contents) at the SQDC.
 - Avoid using alone.
 - When using with other people, don't all use at the same time.
 - Have naloxone close at hand 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 (not dangerous, even when it isn't necessary).
 - Call 911 if anyone overdoses (the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* provides immunity from simple possession charges for those who call 911 in the case of an overdose).
3. Inform and, if needed, accompany users so they can obtain naloxone for free in community pharmacies and organizations listed in the INSPQ directory.
<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/cartes/naloxone/index.html>

For more information:

<https://santemontreal.qc.ca/en/professionnels/drsp/sujets-de-a-a-z/surdoses/prevention-des-surdoses-liees-aux-drogues/>