

# COVID-19: Guidance Document for Service Providers

## Substance Use & Harm Reduction

### Background

In addition to the risks for infection from COVID-19 for those experiencing homelessness, substance use and harm reduction practices must also be considered for this demographic.

As we know, those experiencing homelessness have a much higher rate of harm associated with substance use compared to the general Canadian population. Emergency housing service settings that provide temporary housing, congregate living spaces or other services for people who are experiencing homelessness or who are under-housed, are diverse and face unique issues in supporting the populations that they serve.

### Purpose

This interim document is intended to help service providers:

- Provide harm reduction strategies to clients who use substances and/or have a substance use disorder while maintaining the appropriate COVID-19 protocols
- Refer clients to services in the community to best meet their needs around substance use and harm reduction supplies

As this situation continues to evolve and change, York Region Public Health will provide updated information. This interim information should be adapted to individual settings.

### Risk of Overdose

COVID-19 is a virus that can cause respiratory issues and other health problems.

Using drugs such as fentanyl and other opioids can slow your breathing rate, and COVID-19 symptoms such as shortness of breath may increase the risk of overdose death.

### Harm Reduction Tips to Help People Who Use Drugs

#### Provide supplies to clients:

COVID-19 is spread mainly from person to person through close contact. Supplies are important in preventing sharing between individuals using substances, thus potentially reducing the risk of spreading the virus and other pathogens.

Offer clients extra harm reduction supplies in case there is a closure of their usual site including:

- Syringes and other injection equipment
- Crystal meth/crack smoking supplies, and/or snorting supplies (Sharps containers/biobins)

When possible, provide gloves, face coverings (i.e. face clothes, face masks) and hand sanitizers to your clients and teach them how to use them.

### **Provide education**

With clients, discuss how to carry naloxone and to ensure they have an overdose plan. You should also talk about:

- The risk of spreading the virus when sharing supplies:
  - Encourage clients not to share cigarettes, joints, supplies for injecting and using other drugs, containers for alcohol, utensils, and other supplies
  - Discuss using approved and safe waste disposal containers (i.e. sharps containers/biobins) for all used injection, smoking and/or snorting supplies
- Frequent handwashing for 20 seconds with soap and water, before and after wiping packages, surfaces and handling drugs. If soap and water is not available, use hand sanitizer
- Using microbial wipes, alcohol or bleach to wipe down packages, surfaces before and after handling drugs
- Having a buddy when using:
  - Emphasizing staying two meters (6 feet) from the buddy to avoid potentially passing the virus
  - Having a buddy present on the phone while using
- Reinforce physical distancing procedures and/ or reducing close contact
- Self-monitoring for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and discussing when it's appropriate to seek medical help (i.e. hospital, 911). If symptoms appear, support the client in contacting:
  - Their primary health care provider
  - Telehealth Ontario at: 1-877-797-0000
  - York Region Public Health, Health Connection at: 1-800-361-5653
  - Support the client in accessing the nearest COVID-19 Assessment Center. For a list of York Region assessment centers, please visit [york.ca/covid19](http://york.ca/covid19)

Clients should be made aware that COVID-19 infection can compromise the respiratory system and make respiratory failure/crisis more likely in an opioid overdose.

### **Harm Reduction & Naloxone Supplies**

The York Region Public Health Substance Use Prevention & Harm Reduction Program is continuing to provide training, access and distribution of naloxone and other harm reduction supplies to clients and community agencies.

Note: Contact-less naloxone training and drop-off are available.

If you have questions regarding obtaining naloxone and/or other harm reduction supplies, please call 1-877-464-9675 ext. 76683 or email [substance@york.ca](mailto:substance@york.ca).

For injection and crystal meth/crack smoking supplies for clients contact:

- CAYR Community Connections (formerly AIDS Committee of York Region): 905-884-0613 (also for naloxone kits)
- Loft Crosslinks Street Outreach Van: 1-866-553-4053

### **Where to get a naloxone kit at no cost**

Visit the Ontario Government website and their [Where to get a free naloxone kit](#) webpage for a map of pharmacies and agencies that distribute naloxone in your area.

Note: Some agencies on this tool may not be operating during this time. Contact the York Region Public Health, Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Program if you are unable to access naloxone using this tool.

## **Tools and Supports for Client Referral**

### **Report Bad Drugs**

[Report Bad Drugs](#) (found at: [York.ca/reportbaddrugs](http://York.ca/reportbaddrugs)) is an anonymous, online reporting tool for community partners and the public. Anyone with a concern or bad experience with street drugs or overdoses in the community can use the [tool](#) to share information with York Region Public Health. For more information visit the [Report Bad Drugs Tool Q&A](#).

This reporting tool is not for emergencies. If you are experiencing an emergency, call 911 immediately.

### **310- COPE**

For clients feeling depressed, lonely, anxious, scared, angry, or are in distress, call: 310-COPE. Phone: 1-855-310-2673 or (TTY) 1-866-323-7785  
Web: [www.yssn.ca/310-COPE](http://www.yssn.ca/310-COPE)

### **Overdose Prevention Line**

Grenfell Ministries Overdose Prevention Line (O.P.L) offers an overall anonymous service to clients who are about to use drugs. The staff will stay with the client on the phone line while the client uses drugs and will call 911 in the event of a possible/actual overdose at the location the client has provided.

Phone: 1-888-853-8542

Web: [www.grenfellministries.org/overdose-prevention-line](http://www.grenfellministries.org/overdose-prevention-line)

### **Krasman Centre Warm Line and Peer Crisis Support Service**

These services provide non-crisis and crisis live support from a recovery and peer informed perspective in the York Region, South Simcoe and North York areas (the Central LHIN). They

are serviced by individuals with lived experience with mental health concerns, addiction, and/or trauma.

Phone: 1-888-777-0979

Chat: [tawk.to/chat/5e71049beec7650c33209ce1/default](http://tawk.to/chat/5e71049beec7650c33209ce1/default)

## **Addiction and Treatment Specific Support Referrals**

### **Connex Ontario**

Connex Ontario provides free and confidential, 24/7 health services information for people experiencing problems with alcohol and drugs, mental illness and/or gambling.

Phone: 1-866-531-2600

Chat: [www.connexontario.ca/Home/Chat](http://www.connexontario.ca/Home/Chat)

Connex Go app: [www.connexontario.ca/Mobile/Index](http://www.connexontario.ca/Mobile/Index)

### **Central Health Line**

Central Health Line provides a list of alcohol and drug addiction assessment and treatment services in York Region.

Web: [www.centralhealthline.ca/listServices.aspx?id=10095&region=YorkRegion](http://www.centralhealthline.ca/listServices.aspx?id=10095&region=YorkRegion)

### **Addiction Services for York Region**

Addiction Services for York Region provides community treatment services, support and assistance to clients struggling with substance use and problem gambling through their virtual Rapid Access Addictions Medicine (RAAM) clinics.

Phone for intake, information and referral to available services: (905) 841-7007, ext. 322

Web: [www.asyr.ca/asyr-offices-temporarily-closed-due-to-covid-19-safety-measures/](http://www.asyr.ca/asyr-offices-temporarily-closed-due-to-covid-19-safety-measures/)

## **References**

BC Centre for Disease Control (2020). COVID-19 :Harm Reduction and Overdose Response. Accessed from: [www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19-harm-reduction.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19-harm-reduction.pdf)

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