

Alert

Communication to community stakeholders, first responders and police services

Possible overdoses psychoactive substances (drugs) in Nunavik

By:
Dr. Simon Riendeau, Medical Advisor
Alexandra Lachance, Advisor
Infectious-Diseases Team

The Public Health Department of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services has been informed of possible recent opioid overdoses in Nunavik. In this context, we consider it necessary to inform you of our concerns, to offer a reminder on the role of public health and the optimal use of naloxone during an intoxication situation.

Importance of reporting to public health in cases of suspected psychoactive substance overdose

The Public Health Department invites stakeholders to report any suspected overdose situation as soon as possible. Reporting allows for the initiation of information collection to identify the source of the substance and, if possible, to remove it from circulation, and to alert the public to ensure the safety of Nunavummiut. It can help save lives!

Examples of situations that should be reported:

- Suspected drug overdose.
- An unusual seizure of drugs.
- The circulation of a drug of concern.

To report

Business days from 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.:

surveillance.vigie.nrbhss@ssss.gouv.qc.ca

Outside business days, before 9:00 a.m. or after 5:00 p.m.:

Physician for public health at **1-855 964-2244** (toll free) or **1-819 299-2990** (alternative number in case of problems with the toll-free number).

Access to naloxone at all clinics in the region

Naloxone is available free of charge and without a prescription in all health facilities in Nunavik. If you have friends or family consuming near you, it is recommended to have some at home to use quickly in case of emergency.



Main signs of psychoactive substance overdose:

- Decreased state of consciousness: the person does not react to noise or pain; presence of confusion, drowsiness or inability to wake up.
- Presence of breathing sounds (e.g. snoring, suffocation sounds).
- Blue lips or nails.
- Difficult, slow or non-existent breathing.

Administration of intranasal naloxone

Naloxone is an antidote specific to opioids. It temporarily reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. Naloxone can be given by anyone who witnesses an overdose without risk of harm.

Naloxone is safe and does not pose a danger to the health of the person who is intoxicated or to the health of a person who is not addicted to opioids. In case of doubt, it is better to administer it to the person in a state of intoxication. The person should be brought directly to the health centre after administration.

Keep in mind that in a context of decreased state of consciousness, substances contaminated with opioids may be involved and naloxone administration is recommended.

For more information regarding the method of administration, we invite you to refer to this link: [21-233-08A_v1 \(gouv.qc.ca\)](https://21-233-08A_v1.gouv.qc.ca)

Description of opioids

Psychoactive substances are classified into three categories based on their effects: disruptors (e.g., cannabis, ecstasy), depressants (e.g., opioids, alcohol) or stimulants (e.g., cocaine, amphetamines). Opioids are natural or lab-made substances. They act in the areas of the brain responsible for pain control. Misuse of opioids can carry health risks. The main risks are addiction and overdose.

When psychoactive substances are purchased on the black market, the quality of the product is not assured. Substances can be contaminated with opioids. The person who consumes can therefore find himself in a state of accidental overdose, even without having consumed excessively.