John Howard
THE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ALBERTA

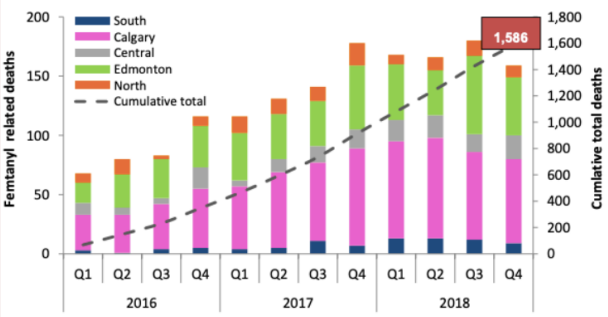
Fentanyl in Alberta

Fact Sheet 2019

What is Fentanyl?

- Fentanyl is a strong synthetic narcotic that is made from opioids.
  - It is about 50 to 100 times more powerful.
- Fentanyl is being imported and mixed into other drugs and illegally sold.
  - Non-pharmaceutical fentanyl is sold:
    - As a powder.
    - Spiked on blotter paper.
    - Mixed with or substituted for heroin.
    - As tablets (mimicking less potent opioids).
- Two or three milligrams of fentanyl can be enough to kill the average adult.[1]

Fentanyl Overdose Deaths in Alberta:



- Fentanyl was reported to be 73% of all drug overdoses between January and September 2018.
- From 2016 to 2018 there have been a total of 1,586 individuals in Alberta who have had died due to accidental fentanyl poisoning.
- In 2018, there were 673 deaths related to fentanyl compared to 637 in the previous year.
- 88% of fentanyl related deaths in 2018 occurred in large urban municipalities.
- 78% of fentanyl deaths were male and aged between 25-39 years.[2]

[1] Opioid reports. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.alberta.ca/opioid-reports.aspx
Fentanyl abuse: Top 11 facts about this potent and deadly opioid. Retrieved from https://www.drugs.com/illicit/fentanyl.html

[2] Alberta Government. (2019, March). Alberta opioid responses surveillance report. Retrieved from https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/f4b74c38-88cb-41ed-aa6f-32db93c7c391/resource/0654bbdd-f26e-4add-9ffd-b7146fd25554/download/opioid-response-surveillance-report-2018-q4.pdf

Emergency Department visits related to Poisoning by Opioids and Narcotics:

- In Alberta's between 2015 and 2018 emergency department visits related to harm associated with opioids and other drugs had increase by 65%.
- In 2018, the Calgary and Edmonton zones had the highest number of emergency department visits.
  - Calgary made up 30% of the provinces emergency department visits.
  - Edmonton made up 25% of all provincial emergency department visits.[3]

Overdoses:

- In overdoses, similar to other opioids, fentanyl relaxes its user to a point where breathing stops; this can be fatal without medical intervention.
- When fentanyl is mixed with other substances, the potential danger amplifies.
- Overdose is generally treatable depending on how quickly a person is brought in contact with naloxone, a drug used to counter the effects of opioids. However, without oxygen for even a short time, serious cognitive impairments can develop.[4]

[3] Alberta Government. (2019, March). Alberta opioid responses surveillance report. Retrieved from https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/f4b74c38-88cb-41ed-aa6f-32db93c7c391/resource/0654bbdd-f26e-4add-9ffd-b7146fd25554/download/opioid-response-surveillance-report-2018-q4.pdf

[4] Government of Canada. (2019, April 10). National report: Apparent opioid-related deaths in Canada. Retrieved from https://health-infobase.canada.ca/datalab/national-surveillance-opioid-mortality.html
4Fentanyl. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/street-fentanyl

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Signs of Overdose:

- Breathing is slow or not breathing at all.
- Nails and/or lips are blue.
- Choking or throwing up.
- Making gurgling sounds.
- Skin is cold and clammy.
- Can't wake them up.[5]

Carfentanil:

- With the increase in popularity that fentanyl has there has been an introduction to another drug called carfentanil.
- Traditionally carfentanil was used by veterinaries to tranquilize and sedate wild animals.
- Carfentanil is 100 times more powerful then fentanyl and 10,000 times more powerful then morphine.
- 20 micrograms of carfentanil is enough to be fatal to a person.
- Naloxone has been used to reverse a carfentanil overdose. However, greater amounts then normal are required to revive those who have overdosed.[6]

Prison Population:

- While prisons have security in place to detect illicit drugs and general contraband entering an institution, prisons are not free of fentanyl or other opioids from entering.
- From 2013-2016 there were 27 overdoses related to fentanyl.[7]

[5] Fentanyl. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/street-fentanyl

[6] Alberta Addiction and Mental Health Research Partnership Program. (2018, February). Carfentanil – backgrounder. https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/res/if-res-mhr-carfentanil-backgrounder.pdf

[7] Crawford, A., (2016, October 16). Corrections Canada trying to stop inmates from overdosing on fentanyl. Retrieved from https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/fentanyl-prisons-correctional-service-canada-1.3805709