

OPIOID PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

(Excerpt from “2019 OPIOIDS AND OVERDOSES Impacts and Strategies” O.P.P. Report. With permission.)

Opioids

Depending on the context, opioids can be legal/licit or illegal/illicit. Opioids are a class of drugs regulated under Schedule I of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)*. Some are derived from the opium poppy plant, some are semi-synthetic and synthetic. Examples of opioids include:

- Codeine
- Fentanyl
- Heroin
- Hydromorphone
- Methadone
- Morphine
- Opium
- Oxycodone

Opioids have the potential to cause euphoria which can lead to dependence and opioid use disorder. An opioid overdose can cause respiratory depression leading to permanent brain damage or death.

Legal opioids

Some opioids can be obtained legally with a prescription and supervision from a medical professional. Medically prescribed opioids are primarily used to reduce pain and are available in an increasing range of formulations and potencies.¹⁴

Illegal opioids

Without a valid prescription, possession or other involvements with any opioid is illegal and can be subject to law enforcement action. Some examples involving illicit opioids include:

- Possession of someone else's prescription medication;
- Possession of an opioid purchased illegally from a drug trafficker either locally or online;
- Selling or providing opioids to anyone unless authorized to do so by law.

Naloxone

Naloxone, NARCAN® intranasal spray, is used to temporarily reverse the effects of opioids¹⁵ including respiratory depression, sedation and hypotension. Although other formulations of naloxone are available, the term naloxone in this report refers to the intranasal spray form of naloxone carried by the OPP.

Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act (GSDOA), 2017¹⁶

In May 2017, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act (GSDOA)* was signed into federal law.¹⁷ This Act provides some legal protection for individuals who seek emergency assistance during an overdose. The Act defines overdose as: “a physiological event induced by the introduction of a controlled substance into the body of a person that results in a life-threatening situation and that a reasonable person would believe requires emergency medical or law enforcement assistance.”

This Act provides some federally dictated legal protection for individuals who experience or witness an overdose and call 911 for assistance. This Act can protect from:

- Charges for possession of a controlled substance (i.e. drugs) under section 4(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act; and
- Breach of conditions regarding simple possession of controlled substances (i.e. drugs) in: pre-trial release, probation orders, conditional sentences and parole.

Suspected

The term “suspected” indicates that whatever is being described cannot be confirmed. For example: a suspected overdose or a suspected fentanyl seizure. Without pertinent medical data (e.g. toxicology report, pathologist reports) the police cannot confirm that the individual experienced an overdose or that the victim's cause of death was a result of substance toxicity. Similarly, substances that are seized require identification by DAS. Additional pieces of information from external agencies are often required to confirm what the police suspect.

¹⁴<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html>

¹⁵<https://www.narcan.com/>

¹⁶https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2017_4/page-1.html

¹⁷<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/problematic-prescription-drug-use/opioids/about-good-samaritan-drug-overdose-act.html>