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Info-MADO

Newsletter on Notifiable Diseases Nunavik Department of Public Health

Intoxication risk - Opioid overdose

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Risk of overdose from contaminated methamphetamines

The Department of Public Health of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services has been informed that methamphetamine tablets (*speed*) may be in circulation in Nunavik communities, notably in Akulivik and Puvirnituq.

What is methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine (*speed*) is a psychostimulant. It is usually smoked or snorted and, more rarely, injected or ingested orally.

Clinical manifestations of methamphetamine use include increased energy and alertness, euphoria, activation of the sympathetic nervous system, decreased need for sleep, weight loss, dry mouth, leading to tooth decay, and chronic changes in mood and cognition, including irritability, anxiety, aggressiveness, panic, distrust and/or paranoia, hallucinations, executive dysfunction, and memory impairment. Methamphetamine can also exacerbate existing psychiatric symptoms.

Possible contamination of drugs

In the current context of the pandemic, supply channels of black markets are likely to be modified. This increases the risks of an overdose due to the possible contamination of drugs, such as with fentanyl (an opioid).

Risk of death from opioid use

Opioids such as morphine, oxycodone, codeine, heroin, fentanyl, carfentanil, etc. are natural or synthetic substances, either prescribed by a doctor or purchased on the street, that can have analgesic and euphoric effects.

They are available as tablets, patches, or injectable solutions for clinical use. In recent years, opioids such as fentanyl and carfentanil have been mixed with recreational drugs such as *speed* and *ecstasy* by producers of illegal substances to enhance their euphoric effect. Regular users of these drugs are often unaware of this and therefore do not adjust the amount taken accordingly.

The most dreaded effect of an opioid overdose is the significant slowing of breathing, or even the complete stop of respiratory functions. It takes only three to five minutes for oxygen deprivation to the brain to cause permanent brain damage. If this deprivation persists, it can lead to significant cognitive impairment, coma, or death.

Reminder to clinicians

The Department of Public Health invites clinicians and caregivers to watch out for the possibility of overdoses among their patients who use drugs, and encourages them to promote a harm reduction approach to prevent deaths:

- 1. Share the information about the circulation of methamphetamine (*speed*) on the territory and the risks associated with its use.
- 2. Provide counseling on safer substance use practices:
 - a. Avoid using alone.
 - b. When many people use, make sure that not everyone uses at the same time so someone can watch over the others.
 - c. Avoid mixing when using, even with alcohol.
 - d. Reduce the amount taken to test the effect of the drug.
 - e. Call 9090 in case of emergency.
 - f. Inform drug users of the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act*, which grants immunity to witnesses of overdoses against charges for simple possession of a controlled substance. Also, recommend calling the police or the CLSC for a quick intervention.
 - g. If necessary, direct people displaying a substance use disorder to addiction treatment services.

Action plan

For reference purposes, a copy of the *Plan d'action régional du Nunavik pour la prévention des surdoses aux opioïdes 2019-2022* is available for clinicians at the Inuulitsivik Health Centre and at the Ungava Tulattavik Health Centre. Here are the measures currently in place to react in case of an overdose:

- 200 doses of naloxone are available in each of the 14 villages of Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay,
- Short training videos on opioid overdose for health care professionals can be watched by the staff at both health centers,
- A surveillance and monitoring system for opioid overdoses is currently being implemented in both health centers.

Reporting a situation to the Department of Public Health

The Department of Public Health invites health care professionals to report any suspected or confirmed case of opioid overdose by using the overdose reporting form.

The following situations should be reported:

- The overdose is presumed to be related to opioids,
 OR
- A lot of people overdosed in a short period of time,
 OR
- The symptoms of the overdose are particularly severe,
- The circumstances are unusual,
 OR
- Any other situation of concern related to the circulation of methamphetamine.

The analysis of reports could lead to an epidemiological investigation by the Department of Public Health to assess the risk and to determine and implement the necessary measures to protect the health of the population.

To report a situation:

Send the form by confidential fax at 1 866 867-8026

For information:

During office hours: Olivier Godin at 418 666-7000, ext. 10160

Outside office hours: On-Call Public Health Doctor at

1 855 964-2244 (toll-free number) or at 1 819 299-2990 (other number in case of issue with the toll-free number)