

Unregulated Drug Poisoning Deaths: A Public Health Crisis

Island Health Region

This topic may bring up unpleasant feelings or thoughts. If you need support, contact the 24/7 Vancouver Island Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888

Since April 2016, British Columbia has been in the midst of a public health emergency of fatal drug poisonings. In the region that Island Health serves, more than 2,744 people have died of a drug poisoning (overdose) since the start of the emergency.

These were our family members, friends, colleagues, community members and loved ones who were lost. While we grieve, the emergency continues to harm communities across all regions of the province and all demographic groups.



Youth: Deaths in BC

2019-2023: Unregulated drug poisoning was the leading cause of unnatural death among youth in BC. Youth continue to be impacted by the crisis.

A special report on youth unregulated drug poisoning deaths in BC shows that of the 10,005 unregulated drug poisoning deaths reported in 2019-2023,

126 deaths

were youth **under 19 years old.**

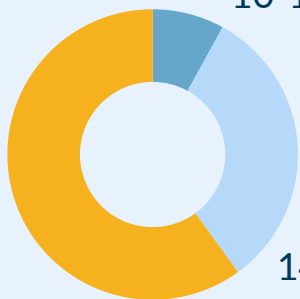
Another 20 youth lost their lives in 2024.

60%

17-18 years old

8%

10-13 yrs



32%

14-16 yrs

Roughly

50%
females

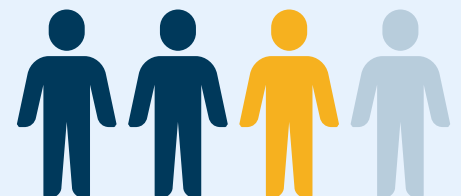


50%
males

In at least

1 in 4 deaths

there were other people around when it happened.



51% were alone

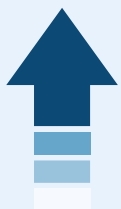
24% were with others

25% unknown

The **Island Health region** accounted for **28%** of these deaths.



Avoid using alone. To have others around virtually, call or text the [National Overdose Response Service \(1-888-688-6677\)](https://www.18886886677.org) or use the [Lifeguard App](#).



As youth age into adulthood, the rate of deaths for their age group

increases dramatically.

2019-2023:

126 deaths in 0-18 yrs; 1,488 deaths in 19-29 yrs; 2,428 deaths in 30-39 yrs.

If you are around when a poisoning happens, knowing how to reverse the poisoning can save a life. [Learn how to recognize and respond](#) if a poisoning happens.



Before Canada and BC were formed, Indigenous Peoples lived in balance and interconnectedness with the land and water in which the necessities of life are provided. Health disparities persist, which are due to the impacts of colonization and Indigenous-specific racism. Healthy lands, healthy people. Island Health acknowledges and recognizes these homelands and the stewardship of Indigenous Peoples of this land. It is with humility we continue to work toward building our relationship.

Unregulated Drug Poisoning Deaths: A Public Health Crisis

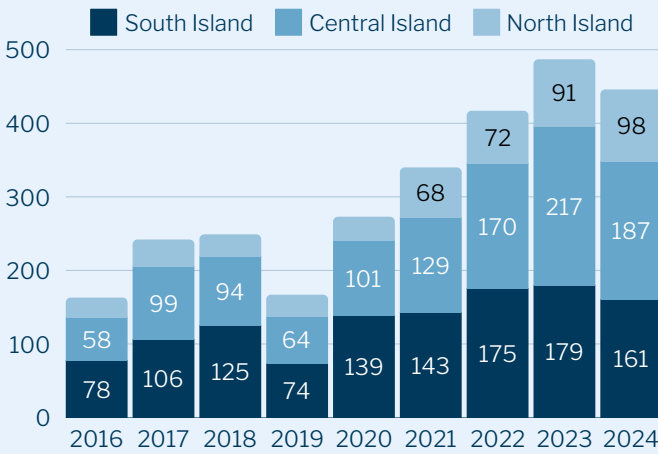
Island Health Region



All Ages: Deaths in Island Health

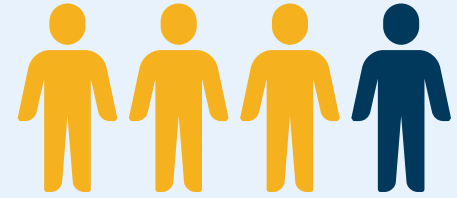
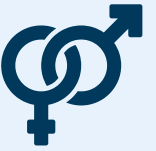
Unregulated drug poisoning is the leading cause of death among those 10-59 years old in Island Health and BC.

The number of deaths each year is **now more than double** what it was in **2016**.



Data up to December 31, 2024

3 in 4 deaths are among males



The female proportion of deaths increased from 22% in 2016-2023 to **26% in 2024**.

In 2024, **85%** of drug poisoning deaths involve **fentanyl**, a powerful opioid.

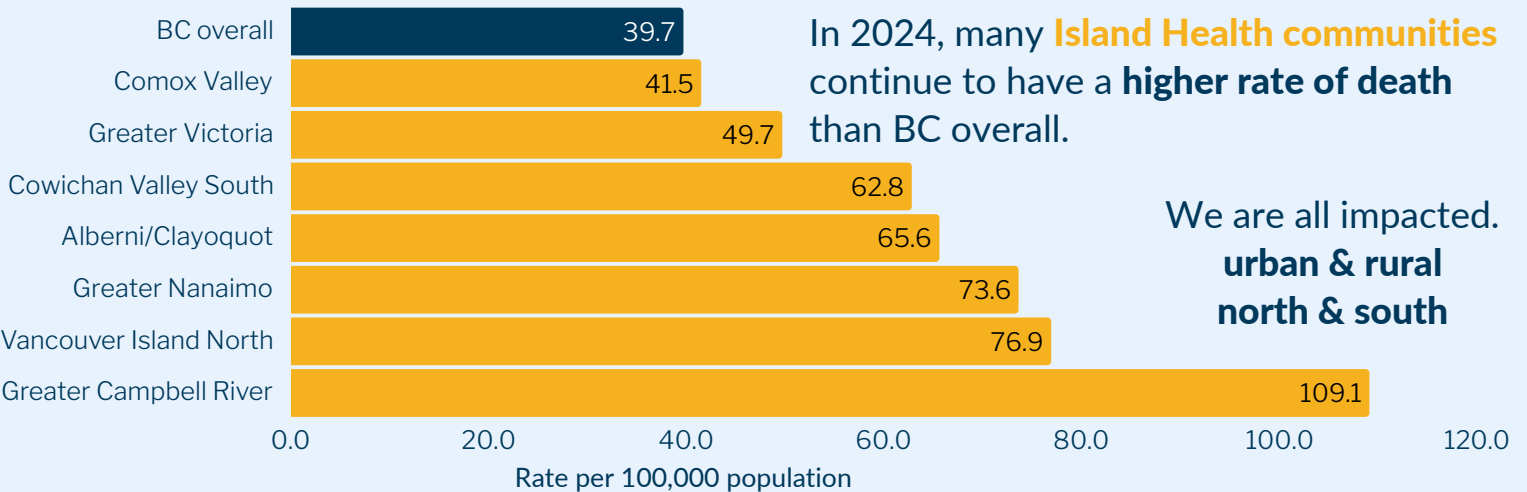
2021-2024 The **majority** of poisoning deaths happen **inside homes**.



54% private residence; 22% other residence; 20% outside

In **73%** of drug poisoning deaths in 2024, the substance was consumed by **smoking**.

11% snorting; 10% injection; 4% oral



In 2024, many **Island Health communities** continue to have a **higher rate of death** than BC overall.

We are all impacted. **urban & rural north & south**

The crisis has had a devastating impact on all of our communities. It is a complex issue, but we can work together to keep our community members and loved ones safe. Help is available.

Find resources and supports at:

Island Health - [Mental Health & Substance Use Information Line](#)



First Nations Health Authority - [Mental Health and Wellness Supports](#)



Across BC - [Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service \(1-800-663-1441\)](#)