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CONCERNS OVER RATE OF OVERDOSES IN DURHAM

People who use drugs are real people.

The opioid crisis continues to impact individuals and families across the Region.

The opioid crisis is a complex public health issue. There are many factors that have led to an increase in opioid-related overdoses. This includes high rates of opioid prescribing and the presence of strong opioid in the illegal drug supply - such as fentanyl.

Since 2003, the number of emergency department visits due to an opioid overdose in Durham Region increased from 160 to 389 visits in 2017. The number of Durham Region opioid related deaths increased from 18 in 2013 to 58 deaths by 2017 (Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion [Public Health Ontario], 2018).

opioid are prescription drugs that are usually prescribed to

treat moderate to severe pain. Other uses include controlling coughs and diarrhea. For some people, opioid can cause euphoria or a "high" which can make them addictive.

There are many different types of opioid that can range in strength. Common opioid include:

- Fentanyl
- Oxycodone
- Hydromorphone
- Morphine
- Codeine (found in Tylenol 2, Tylenol 3, Tylenol 4)
- Methadone
- Heroin

opioid come in many different forms such as:

- Tablets or capsules
- Skin patches
- Syrups
- Liquid for injection
- Nasal spray

Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS) made it public to be aware of an increase

in drug overdose calls. Officers have responded to 12 overdose calls in the last 24 hours -leading police to believe there may be a toxic "batch" of drugs circulating in the region.

This is not uncommon and the number may be a lot higher as many fail to report it.

Others are treated by social workers and or practioners out on the field.

DRPS reminds residents that it is dangerous to use non-prescription drugs purchased from unregulated sources. Illicit drugs may contain contaminants that can cause overdoses and are undetectable to the user.

If you use drugs or know someone who does these tips can help prevent an overdose:

- Never use drugs alone
- Be careful about dosage size: There is no safe level of illicit drug use
- Avoid mixing drugs

-Know the signs and symptoms of an overdose and call 9-1-1 if you or someone you know is possibly overdosing

-Have a Naloxone kit available.

Heather that lives on the street explains, "I am 21, kicked out of my house for my drug use. I have no place to go. I have to have my fix. I normally trade sex for it as I do for shelter some n ites."

Her story is not unique. Many women are out in the cold as the shelters at times are full or refuse to take anyone in that is under the influence.

Wendy, a 62 year old female explains, "I lost my husband and soon after I lost my home. I have no family and no money. The money I use to get I can no longer count on it as it goes fast. My aches and pains only leave me when I am under the influence.

I usually beg for change and turn that into stuff. I spend nites out in the open. I am afraid for when winter comes. People go by and look at me and don't understand that they could be me in the future."

Fred, 34. Explains, "I don't want to be on the street but I have no real choice. The shelters are not safe and the little I have they take it.

Couple of nites back, I seen with my two eyes this kid overdosed right over by them bushes. I felt so bad for him. He lives like me under a tarp with his girlfriend. A week before that they found another kid passed out with a needle stuck in his arm. All I want is my life back but every time i try to get it back I loose it."

There are many stories of those using.

The reality is that it is a community concern.

The overdose prevention line is a number you can call if you are using drugs alone. For more information call 1-888-853-8542.

An overdose on opioid can include any of these signs or symptoms:

- Not waking up
- Limp body
- Slow or no breathing
- Blue lips and nails
- Cold skin
- Very small pupils
- Choking or throwing up
- Snoring or gurgling

An overdose is a medical emergency.

If you think someone has overdosed on opioid, call 911 immediately. Even if naloxone was given, call 911 as naloxone may wear off and overdose symptoms can return.

The drug problem is not just a police going after the suppliers. Police in many cases save lives when they attend overdose calls.

The problem appears according to the individuals we talked to is resources.

Mental health, real and practical resources along with a serious plan of action for individuals down on their luck.

People circumstances change and much like Wendy.

You could be next having to live out on the street as the world is a cold ugly place where no one really cares and it is play by the rules or live with the consequences. Banks, governments and institutions need to be more atuned to the need of the community.



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