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**MEMORANDUM**

**PHD-C 7-2021**

**Subject: Opioid Work Update**  
**Date: March 9, 2021**  
**To: Public Health and Social Services Committee**  
**From: Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Acting Medical Officer of Health**

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In our goal to continue to keep you updated around opioid overdoses, please see the following.

1. On March 2, 2021 Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services (NRPH&ES) was notified by the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario of an increase in the number of suspected drug-related deaths in the past two weeks in Niagara. There were 12 suspected drug-related deaths reported in the last two weeks of February compared to five deaths in the first two weeks of the month. A monthly median of 16 suspect-drug related deaths was reported in 2020.
2. COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted people who use substances. Drug supply lines have been disrupted resulting in increasingly toxic substances entering the street market. Lockdowns and social isolation has presented further challenges for those struggling with substance use and mental health issues with decreased access to supports.
3. All eligible agencies that have chosen to be a public access point for Naloxone are listed on the [Ontario Government Website](https://www.ontario.ca/page/where-get-free-naloxone-kit) (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/where-get-free-naloxone-kit>). Currently over 30 programs and organizations across the region are enrolled in the Ontario Naloxone Program. Staff are trained on how to train their clients on how to avoid, recognize and ultimately respond to overdoses that may happen on site. Eligible organizations are those that work with at risk populations including outreach programs, shelter, AIDS service organizations and CHC's for example.
4. Overdose Prevention and Education Network of Niagara (OPENN) updates: An advisory was sent out to the OPENN distribution list March 1, 2021 generated by reviewing reports of what front-line workers were directly observing or hearing

about “on the street”. These advisories are also informed by EMS data, Toronto drug checking service and alerts, and alerts generated from neighbouring jurisdictions.

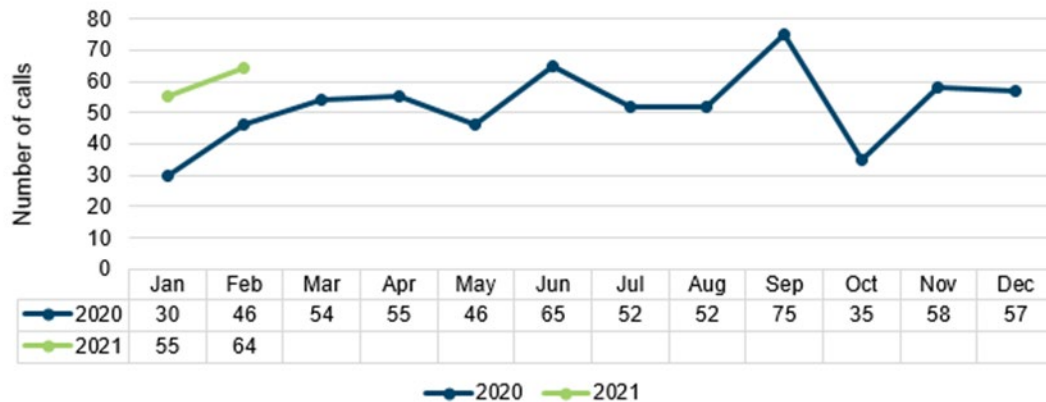
Safe Supply Working Group is working on developing a Continuing Medical Education (CME) accredited training for prescribers to understand what safe supply prescribing is, provide examples of case studies and connect prescribers with the Ontario Safe Supply Community of Practice. All of this is a means to divert people from the toxic street supply into health care provider setting prescribing pharmaceutical opioids.

OPENN developed the OPENN Substance Use Prevention Strategy in 2020. This strategy reflects the input of a wide range of insights and expertise to address the issue of preventing and reducing substance use and related harms in Niagara. The nine recommendations detailed in the strategy are currently being mapped with partners in the community who are already leading work in multiple areas. OPENN will track its progress and publically report on how we are moving from recommendation to action.

5. The website is updated as data becomes available. These updates are available through the [NRPH & ES Drug Overdose Prevention site](https://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/alc-sub-abuse/drugs/overdose-prevention.aspx) ([https://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health\\_wellness/alc-sub-abuse/drugs/overdose-prevention.aspx](https://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/alc-sub-abuse/drugs/overdose-prevention.aspx)), in addition to elsewhere on the Region’s site.
6. For this report, we have included some preliminary data (in broken lines) in addition to the data found on the website.

### Opioid Update 2021/03/04

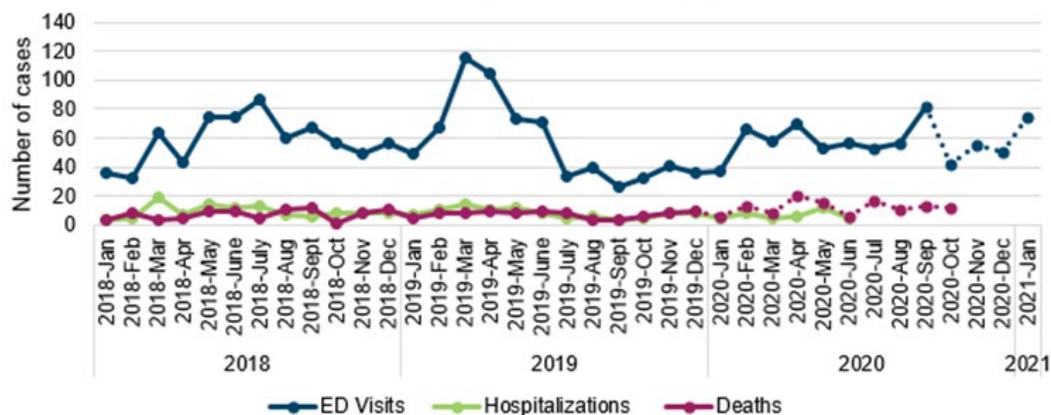
#### Suspected opioid overdoses responded to by Niagara Region Emergency Medical Services (2020-21)



Data Source: Niagara Emergency Medical Services, 2019-2020

- From January to February 2021, there were 119 suspected opioid overdoses that were responded to by EMS. This is an average of 60 calls per month
  - There were 64 EMS calls in February. This is the highest since September 2020 (75 calls).
- In 2020, there were 625 suspected opioid overdoses that were responded to by EMS. This was an average of 52 call per month.
  - This is also an all-time high for EMS calls made in one year.

#### Opioid-related morbidity and mortality (2018-2021)



Data source: National Ambulatory Care Reporting System, 2018-2021; Discharge Abstract Database, 2018-2020; Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, 2018-2020.

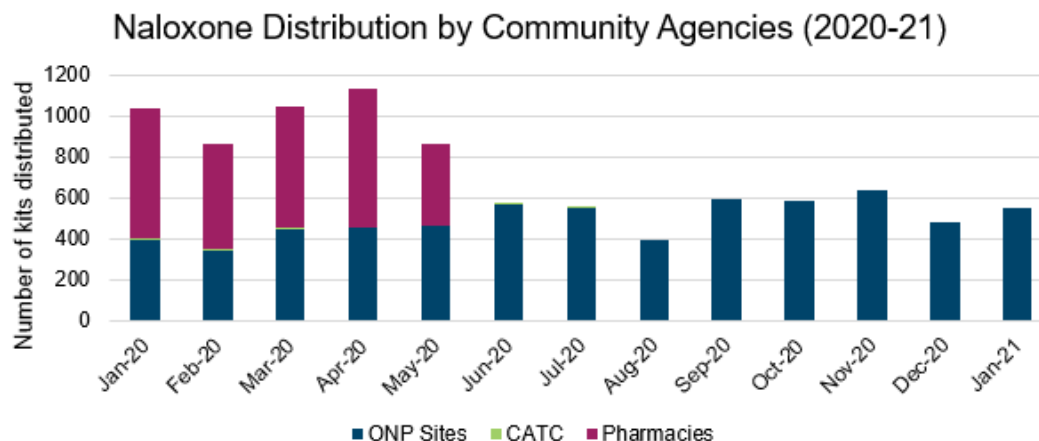
Note: ED visit data from October 2020 and onward is considered preliminary and should be interpreted with caution; Death data for 2020 is also considered preliminary and should be interpreted with caution

## **Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations**

- In 2020, there was a total of 681 emergency department (ED) visits. This is an average of 57 ED visits per month.
  - From January to September 2020, there have been 69 hospitalizations. This is an average of eight hospitalizations per month.
- In 2019, there was a total of 690 opioid poisoning ED visits and 99 hospitalizations. This is an average of 58 ED visits and eight hospitalizations per month.
- In 2018, there were a total of 700 opioid poisoning ED visits, and 110 hospitalizations. This is an average of 58 ED visits and nine hospitalizations per month.

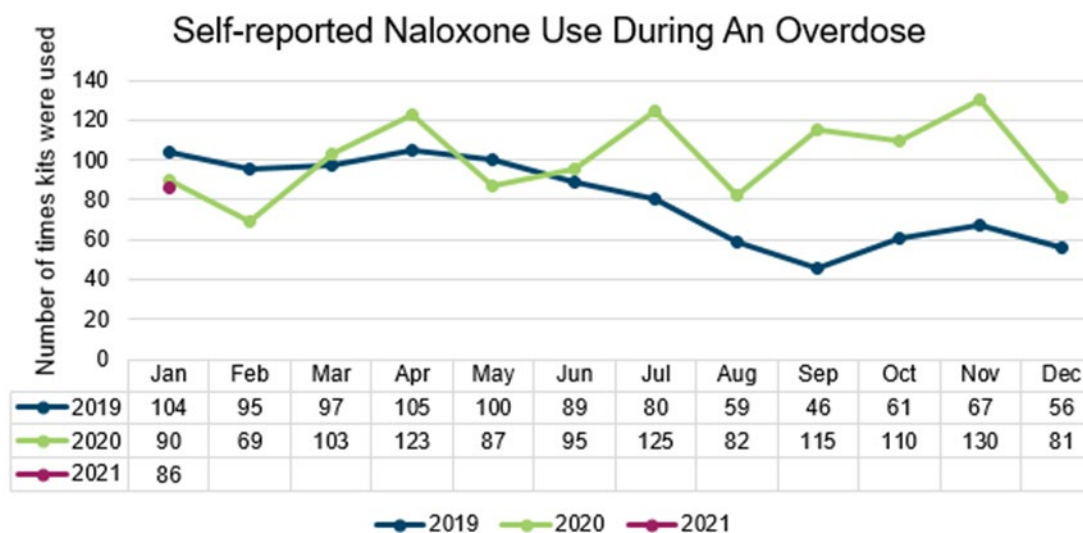
## **Deaths**

- From January to October 2020, there have been 123 opioid overdose deaths. This is an average of 12 deaths per month.
  - Data indicated that 2020 will reach an all-time high for opioid-related deaths in a single year
- In 2019, there were 89 opioid overdose deaths. This is an average of seven deaths per month.
  - Fentanyl was the most common type of opioid present at the time of death (present in 79% of deaths), followed by methadone (present in 18% of deaths).



**Data source:** Niagara Region Public Health, 2020; Ontario Drug Policy Research Network; Ontario Prescription Opioid Tool, 2020.

**Note:** Data for naloxone distribution from Canadian Addiction Treatment Centres and pharmacies are only available up until the end of May 2020



**Data source:** Niagara Region Naloxone Distribution and Use [2019-2021].

- In January 2021, there were 551 naloxone kits distributed by Ontario Naloxone Program sites in Niagara
  - Naloxone kits were reported to be used 86 times during that month
- In 2020, there were 5,881 naloxone kits distributed by Ontario Naloxone Program sites in Niagara
  - Naloxone kits were reported to be used 1,210 times for all of 2020

- From January to May 2020, there were 4,931 naloxone kits distributed by pharmacies, Ontario Naloxone Program sites, and the Canadian Addiction Treatment Centres in Niagara.
- In 2019, there were 13,553 naloxone kits distributed by pharmacies, Ontario Naloxone Program sites, and the Canadian Addiction Treatment Centres in Niagara
  - Naloxone kits were reported to be used 959 times for all of 2019

We will continue to keep you updated.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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M. Mustafa Hirji, MD, MPH, RCPC  
Acting Medical Officer of Health  
Public Health and Emergency Services