

Summary of Toxicology News in BC and Health Regions in April and May 2018

Reza Afshari*, Environmental Health Services, BC Centre for Disease Control, BC. Reza.Afshari@bccdc.ca [Editorial 2017-05-28]

Public Health and Environmental Toxicology: What is BCTOX and why?

Health professionals (HP) including policymakers, health educators and researchers need to be regularly updated on environmental toxicology issues to keep up with rapidly evolving toxicology information, emerging health risks from environmental chemicals and to manage issues that are locally highlighted in the popular press and news media.

Environmental toxicology training is limited during education, and when HPs enter the field, they lack information on the responsibilities for regulation and risk communication among local, provincial and federal agencies, as well as their relations to international organizations, scholarly articles, and private sectors, including industry¹. All of these factors lead to avoidable confusion.

BCTOX acts as a local up-to-date resource to answer current toxicology issues. The business model of BCTOX is flexible in order to maximise its applicability. BCTOX is also still developing, and will be determining its future directions along the way.

BCTOX acts like a pendulum. It mobilises your interventions to other places where they can also be used, and also back-translates the health activities that have had a "life outside of the health system" and have made societal impacts. While BCTOX is not official and not liable for the reported news from media, it is BC-related and full of concise information that is handpicked and fun to read. BCTOX keeps you engaged with toxicology news in BC.

BCTOX is full of inspiring ideas dedicated to B.C.

Major toxicological statistics March 2018

Mortalities In total, around 700 premature deaths could be attributed to toxic exposures in BC in May including:

- **ACUTE exposures;** ≈
 - ≈160 due to Illicit drug overdose
 - 10 due to suicides (CO, drugs and alcohol)
- **CHRONIC current and past exposures;**
 - 500 due to smoking and tobacco use,
 - 81 (air pollution),
 - 11 (radon)
 - 7 (asbestos)

These are equal to overall 15×10^{-5} population toxic exposure-induced deaths in March alone, including 2.4×10^{-5} acute and 13×10^{-5} chronic toxicities (estimations are subject to assumptions and limitations, and overlaps are possible (see BCTOX 2(8): 103)).

Morbidities Around 2200 calls were made to BC-DPIC (estimated from August 2017)

Sola dosis facit venenum

Only the dose makes the poison!

Paracelsus (1493 – 1541 CE)

Summary of Toxicology News for First Nations Populations, April and May 2018, BC

➤ Tripartite health initiative for \$30 million

The Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) will each invest \$10 million over two years for a total funding commitment of \$30 million for Mental Health and Wellness.

Grand Chief Doug Kelly; Chair of the First Nations Health Council:

"These investments and the priorities they address are the result of the engagement we have done with our regional and sub-regional caucuses," said Grand Chief Doug Kelly, chair of the First Nations Health Council. "They've told us that untreated trauma and mental health and substance use issues are perpetuating the physical, psychological and economic disparities suffered by our people. By making these investments today, we are building the foundation of our shared vision of healthy, self-determining and vibrant First Nation children, families and communities."

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ Kinder Morgan

--- Making a living by burning poisons

--- The curse of easy energy

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ B.C. coroner releases report into deaths of young adults transitioning from government care

The number of deaths involving young people who were Indigenous – 68 of the 200 – is concerning according to Shannon McDonald, deputy chief medical officer of the First Nations Health Authority.

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ Citizens vow to make community safe again

A movement against drugs and alcohol is gaining momentum in the First Nations community of Hitacu.



Hitacu rallies against drugs and alcohol

Photo adopted from BC Local News

[\(Read more\)](#)

Naloxone kits are available in 1,500 locations in BC, including First Nations sites and community pharmacies.

[\(Read more\)](#)

Summary of Toxicology News for Fraser Health, April and May 2018, BC

➤ Fentanyl deaths

Fraser Health Authority had the highest number (377) of illicit drug overdose deaths with fentanyl detected in 2017, followed by Vancouver Coastal Health (337) and the Interior Health Authority (200).

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ Survey for drug users (Health Chat)

Fraser Health launched survey for drug users. Investigators are looking to connect with “the hidden population” making up a large number of overdose deaths in the province.



Drug use survey

We've created this survey to ask you - whether you are a person who uses drugs or you know someone who does - how we can better support people who use drugs.

The survey is anonymous, and will take about five minutes to complete.

[Next >](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) [Technical Support](#) [Terms of Use](#)

VISIONCRITICA

*This survey contains proprietary information which may include confidential information. Participation in this survey does not convey any rights to reproduce or distribute its contents. Any reproduction or distribution of this survey or its contents without express written consent is strictly prohibited.

[Online, anonymous survey](#)

Those using alone and in their homes are a target. Results will be used to determine what steps the Health Authority can take next that “will make the biggest difference.”

The anonymous survey aims to identify barriers to support and how services could be improved.

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ Overdose and school graduation

Fraser Health warns of substance use, overdose ahead of graduation.

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ Non-profit offers free used needle recovery service

Lookout Housing and Health Society is a charitable organization and social safety net.

<https://lookoutsociety.ca/>

[\(Read more\)](#)

Summary of Toxicology News for Interior Health, April and May 2018, BC

➤ Interior Health launches website targeting people who use drugs alone

57% of overdose deaths in 2017 occurred among people who were using illicit drugs alone in BC. Interior Health launches website targeting people who use drugs alone. All responses to their survey will be anonymous.



<https://www.usesafe.ca/>

➤ Over 1000 Kokanee Salmon have been found dead since May 25th.

The government is investigating over 1,000 kokanee salmon washed up on the northern shores of Okanagan Lake since May 25.



Photo adopted from Castanet

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ Spread of biosolids in Kamloops

The City of Kamloops contractor will be spreading biosolids in Barnhartvale. About 12,500 tonnes of biosolids is produced each year through the city's sewage-treatment plant.

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ A real-time, interactive water advisory map has been launched by IH

<https://drinkingwaterforeveryone.ca/>

[\(Read more\)](#)

Summary of Toxicology News for Northern Health, April and May 2018, BC

➤ **Permit smoking or inhaled forms of marijuana in hospital settings.**

It is unlikely that the currently developing policies in Northern Health or other Health Authorities permit smoking or inhaled forms of marijuana in hospital settings.

“Administering marijuana for in-patient settings is a virtually impossible task without changes in regulations and legislation, according to Dr. Pippa Hawley of the BC Cancer Agency.”

--- Pharmacists are not permitted to identify, dispense, relabel or store medical cannabis.

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ **Water Quality Advisory Continues in Kitimat**

The advisory was issued in conjunction with Northern Health on May 7th, due to high turbidity in the Kitimat River.

[\(Read more\)](#)

Summary of Toxicology News for Vancouver Coastal Health, April and May 2018, BC

➤ **Over 120 BC schools report unsafe levels of lead in drinking water**

More than 120 of those schools had a sample that failed to meet the Canadian standard for lead in drinking water.

The Canadian standard for lead in drinking water is 0.01 mg/L.

“BC lags behind Ontario, which has mandated testing at both schools and daycares since 2007 and recently beefed up its requirements.”

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ **An increase in drug overdoses in the Vancouver area**

Health officials are warning of an increase in drug overdoses in the Vancouver area.

Potential reasons for the surge include

- ✓ Social assistance cheques being sent out
- ✓ High concentrations of fentanyl in heroin

--- “Take-home naloxone kits have helped lower the number of calls, because friends or family members can immediately respond to an overdose.”

[\(Read more\)](#)

Other news – Reminders from the past

➤ **Green-coloured opiate (A report from Nov 2017)**

Vancouver Coastal Health issues warning about green-coloured opiate after a rash of overdoses in the Downtown Eastside.

Seven people overdosed (muscle rigidity and constricted pupils) at the Maple Overdose Prevention site after injecting a toxic, green-coloured drug.

- ✓ Do not use alone, have somebody there who can respond if there is an overdose,
- ✓ Use a small amount

[\(Read more\)](#)

Summary of Toxicology News for Vancouver Island, April and May 2018, BC

➤ **A rash of overdoses in Victoria (April)**

“Victoria patrol officers responded to five overdoses within a nine-hour period between Thursday night and Friday morning, exhausting their supply of naloxone”

Emergency crews responded to more than 23,000 calls about overdoses in 2017 in BC.



Photo adopted from Times colonist

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ **Increased number of deaths due to overdose in March**

“Vancouver Island Health Authority is tied with Vancouver's Health Authority for the highest rate of illicit drug overdose deaths, with 37 deaths per 100,000 people.”

The island saw 28 overdose deaths in March, compared with 16 deaths in one month earlier.

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ **100,000 visits since opening first overdose prevention site in Victoria in December 2016**

There are now nine overdose prevention and supervised consumption sites on Vancouver Island.

[\(Read more\)](#)

➤ **Island Health issues overdose advisory in Port Alberni in April**

There was a spike in overdoses in Port Alberni from heroin use, both via injection and smoking.

Use Naloxone If You Have It.

Strategies for safer use:

- New drugs - try a small amount first
- Avoid using alone, use with a friend
- Stagger your use with friends so someone can respond if needed
- Carry Naloxone and have an overdose response plan
- Go to the Overdose Prevention Site - open 8am-4pm
3699 3rd Avenue, Port Alberni

April 6th, 2018

island health

[\(Read more\)](#)

Reference

1. Liverman CT, Ingalls CE, Fulco CE, et al. Toxicology and Environmental Health Information Resources: The Role of the National Library of Medicine. Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Toxicology and Environmental Health Information Resources for Health Professionals; Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US). 1997.