



Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members Public Health Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 8, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Suspect Drug-Related Deaths and Opioid-Related Paramedic Calls (April-June 2023) (BOH23031) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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COUNCIL DIRECTION

This report is in follow-up to direction provided via a motion at the February 13, 2023 Board of Health Meeting:

“That City staff be directed to provide quarterly reports on overdoses tracked by [Emergency Medical Systems] and all deaths related to toxic drugs to the Board of Health beginning in Q2 2023.”

INFORMATION

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the opioid-related impacts in Hamilton from April 1, 2023 to June 30, 2023 (Q2).

Summary

Hamilton experienced a higher number of opioid-related paramedic calls in Q2 2023 which continues the trend observed in Q1 2023. The burden of opioid-related paramedic calls and suspect drug-related deaths remains concentrated in Wards 2 and 3. The distribution of opioid-related paramedic calls and suspect drug-related deaths across different age groups, genders, and locations has generally remained stable when compared to the same quarter in 2022 and 2021.

Through the analysis of mortality data, the number of suspect drug-related deaths has decreased for the second consecutive quarter. Reports from community partners

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

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indicate that toxic and unpredictable drugs continue to circulate in the local drug supply. Further details on the results from this quarter is explained below.

Opioid-Related Paramedic Calls

Opioid-related paramedic calls are defined as calls for which the responding paramedic notes a suspected opioid poisoning.¹ There were 257 opioid-related paramedic calls in Q2 2023; which corresponds to more than 19 opioid-related paramedic calls per week or 2.8 opioid-related paramedic calls per day. The number of opioid-related paramedic calls in this quarter was higher than previous years, and similar to Q1 2023 (see Table 1 below). The count of opioid-related paramedic calls in June (n=98) 2023 exceeded the count of 96 calls in March 2023. These two months have been the highest number of monthly opioid-related paramedic calls recorded since September 2021 (n=103). This continued trend highlights the increasing number of overdoses that are occurring in our community.²

When examining the age and gender distribution of the paramedic calls, almost two out of three (64%, n=164) opioid-related paramedic calls in Q2 2023 involved people aged 25 to 44 years and more than three out of four (78%, n=198) involved males. This has been a consistent distribution observed in the local data over time. While the distribution of calls may fluctuate quarterly, in each year since 2019, 66% to 71% of opioid-related calls have occurred among people aged 25 to 44 years, and 73% to 78% have occurred among males.

Table 1: Q2 counts of opioid-related paramedic calls in Hamilton, 2021-2023

Time Period	Current (Q2 2023)	Q2 2022	Q2 2021
Hamilton (All)	257	176	235

Source: Hamilton Paramedic Services

While opioid-related paramedic calls are made from all areas of Hamilton, the majority of the paramedic calls are concentrated in Wards 2 and 3. In Q2 2023, over half of all opioid-related paramedic calls came from Ward 2 (55%, n=138) and 22% (n=56) from Ward 3. The Wards with the next highest percentages of total opioid-related paramedic calls were Ward 4 (6%, n=15) and Ward 5 (5%, n=12).

¹ City of Hamilton (Healthy and Safe Communities-Public Health Services) Hamilton Opioid Information System. 2023. Available from: <https://www.hamilton.ca/public-health/reporting/hamilton-opioid-information-system>

² City of Hamilton (Healthy and Safe Communities-Public Health Services) Opioid Situation Report (April to June). 2023.

Suspect Drug-Related Deaths

Suspect drug-related deaths are deaths where the investigating coroner's preliminary investigation indicates potential drug involvement.³ Deaths in Hamilton are defined by the location of incident, and do not necessarily describe all deaths among Hamilton residents. Suspect-drug related deaths are not opioid-specific and include deaths that could be related to other drugs. Data are preliminary and subject to change and counts for the most recent two to three months are often underestimated.

Preliminary data indicate that 41 suspect drug-related deaths occurred in Hamilton in Q2 2023; this is an average of 3.2 deaths per week. The number of suspect drug-related deaths is lower than in the previous quarter (see Table 2 below). Q2 2023 also represents the lowest number of suspect drug-related deaths in this period since 2018 (n=37). Similarly, counts of suspect drug-related deaths in Ontario overall during Q2 have also decreased for two consecutive years.

Table 2: Q2 counts of suspect drug-related deaths in Hamilton and Ontario, 2021-2023

Time Period	Current (Q2 2023)	Q2 2022	Q2 2021
Hamilton (All)	41	44	57
Ontario	830	861	985

Source: Office of the Chief Coroner

Most suspect drug-related deaths in Hamilton in Q2 2023 involved males (68%, n= 28). This has been a consistent distribution observed in the local data over time. While the distribution of deaths may fluctuate quarterly, this does not necessarily indicate a changing trend. From 2019 to 2022, yearly percentages of suspect drug-related deaths in Hamilton which occurred among males ranged from 73% to 75%.

Over half of suspect drug-related deaths in Hamilton in Q2 2023 occurred among those aged 30 to 49 years (59%, n=24), which is comparable to Ontario in 2023 (54%, n=441) and to the same period in previous years in Hamilton.

Over the past three years, the highest percentage of suspect drug-related deaths in Hamilton have consistently occurred in forward sortation area L8L. The boundaries of this forward sortation area predominantly overlap with Ward 3, and to a lesser extent with Ward 2. Just under one in six (15%, n=6) incidents of suspect drug-related deaths in Q2 2023 in Hamilton occurred in forward sortation area L8L. Over this period, there were also 6 (15%) suspect drug-related deaths in forward sortation area L8M, a forward sortation area in Ward 3.

³ Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario (OCC), Death Investigation System, received July 14, 2023.

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From April to June 2023 in Hamilton, 76% (n=31) of incidents leading to suspect drug-related death occurred in private residences. From 2019 to 2022, the yearly percentage of incidents occurring in private residences ranged from 72% to 73%.

Community Reports & Alerts

Public Health Services shares a weekly Opioid Situation Report to healthcare providers, social service staff, and community members through the established early-warning email system. Members are able complete a short survey to provide real-time, anecdotal information to contribute to the “Latest from the Frontline” section of the report. The information received from members between April to June 2023 is summarized below.

Between April to June 2023, there were local reports of drug poisonings with unusual symptoms or presentation, and in some cases with extended sedation. There were also reports of drug poisonings requiring many doses of naloxone to reverse. Community members indicated that the current illicit drug supply is very potent and may be contaminated and laced with substances like phencyclidine and benzodiazepines (benzos). One respondent also shared concerns that the community is not educated on drug poisoning symptoms or how to respond, and that many people do not carry naloxone.

In April 2023, there were continued reports of “Yellow Down” circulating locally which was attributed to at least one other drug poisoning. This particular formulation was first highlighted to the community in February 2023 via a Drug Alert and continues to indicate that the local illicit drug supply remains toxic and unpredictable.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable.