

# Statement from the Medical Officer of Health in response to contaminated drugs in the region and increased drug poisonings

Hastings and Prince Edward Counties/Nov. 7, 2023

Today, Dr. Ethan Toumishey, Medical Officer of Health and CEO at Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) joined community partners (Hastings Quinte Paramedic Services, Belleville Police Services, Quinte Health, City of Belleville, Belleville Fire and Emergency Services, and CMHA Hastings Prince Edward) at a media event to reinforce the severity of the current drug poisoning situation.

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Along with our community partners, we continue to be incredibly concerned about contaminated drugs in the region and the current risk of drug poisonings. As reported last week, our region is experiencing an alarming and notably higher rate of calls and reported drug poisoning events than usual.

Police partners have advised that the suspected contaminant in local drugs is GHB. GHB is also known as G, Fantasy, Liquid Ecstasy, or the date rape drug. A [fact sheet \(https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/ghb\)](https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/ghb) is available with more information about the effects and potential impact of this drug – but most important to know is that the impact varies significantly depending on the tolerance of the individual using the drug and the amount of GHB in the drug. While Naloxone can't effectively reverse the effects of GHB, if mixed with an opioid Naloxone will help reverse the effect of the opioid and continues to be incredibly important to have on hand.

All individuals who use drugs are urged to take steps to protect themselves. Avoid mixing drugs, try a small amount first, don't use alone, and have multiple Naloxone kits on hand. Considering the severity of the current situation, anyone who uses drugs or is with someone who is using drugs should be prepared to call for emergency response. If you must use drugs alone, you can call the National Overdose Response Service's confidential overdose prevention hotline 24-hours-a-day at 1-888-688-6677. An operator will stay on the phone with you and will call 911 and advise of possible overdose if they do not receive a response after drugs are administered.

We recognize that using drugs is a reality for many community members and reiterate that help is available – both to reduce potential harms when using drugs, and to provide ongoing supports and treatment. On our website [hpePublicHealth.ca \(https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/\)](https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/), you can find a “[getting help” page \(https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/getting-help/\)](https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/getting-help/) with information and links to community resources, including locations where you can access safer drug use supplies and treatment services.

A drug poisoning is a medical emergency. Anyone who suspects or witnesses a drug poisoning should call 911. The [Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/about-good-samaritan-drug-overdose-act.html) (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/about-good-samaritan-drug-overdose-act.html>) provides some legal protection against simple drug possession charges for anyone who experiences, witnesses, or responds to a drug poisoning and calls 911.

Individuals who witness a drug poisoning in the community can report the event to HPEPH, by completing our online [Overdose Reporting tool](https://hpepublichealth.ca/report-an-overdose/). (<https://hpepublichealth.ca/report-an-overdose/>) This tool is completely anonymous and information is provided to Public Health Nurses to help ensure harm reduction services are available to those who need them most.

HPEPH is committed to working to reduce drug poisoning in the community both in the short and long term. Our local [Opioid Monitoring Dashboard](https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/opioid-monitoring-dashboard/) (<https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/opioid-monitoring-dashboard/>), developed with our community partners, provides a monthly summary of opioid harms and other early warning indicators in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties. A monitoring plan has been developed collaboratively with community partners to support coordinated notification of community members. We are also updating an Opioid Response Strategy in collaboration with our community partners.

I reiterate that this is a very concerning situation – and urge everyone who uses drugs to take whatever steps they can to reduce their risk.

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About Hastings Prince Edward Public Health

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) is a public health agency that serves the counties of Hastings and Prince Edward from four local offices. HPEPH is situated and provides services on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee people. We monitor the health of our local population, deliver programs and services within our communities, and help develop healthy public policies. We provide information and support in many areas to help improve the health and well-being of our residents. Together with our communities, we help people become as healthy as they can be. For more information, please visit [hpePublicHealth.ca](https://hpePublicHealth.ca). You can also find us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter and Instagram.

We invite community partners and residents to share this Media Release with their respective networks.

Previous  
Sudden increase in the number of suspected opioid poisoning events on Nov. 1, 2023  
(<https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/sudden-increase-in-the-number-of-suspected-opioid-poisoning-events-on-nov-1-2023/>)

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