

For Immediate Release | Sept. 29, 2022

Stop guessing – drug checking saves lives

Due to several recent drug poisoning events in the region, Interior Health is urging people to use available drug checking services in order to stay safer. A region-wide [drug alert](#) remains in place following these toxic drug poisonings.

Interior Health has expanded drug checking services in response to the toxic drug crisis. Since being introduced in Nelson in 2018, FTIR (Fourier-Transform Infrared Spectroscopy) instruments are now available in Kamloops, Merritt, Cranbrook, Nelson, Trail, Penticton, Kelowna and Vernon. Using infrared light, these instruments can reliably detect the composition of drugs by comparing them with an extensive library of substances.

The service is fast, free, confidential and most importantly it is the only way for people to know what is in their drugs as the illicit supply continues to be tainted and unpredictable. Drug checking provides the most accurate information about what is in substances, so people who use drugs can make informed choices about where, when, and how much to use.

Drug checking is legal at approved sites. Whether someone is planning to experiment with drugs for the first time, rely on the illicit supply for pain relief, or use drugs on a regular basis and purchase from a familiar source, they are strongly encouraged to drop off a sample beforehand for testing. The technicians who provide the service are non-judgmental, and regardless of the results, drugs will not be confiscated and can be returned to you. Samples can be as small as a grain of rice, and results are typically available within 10 minutes.

In addition to FTIR testing, take home fentanyl test strips are now available in more than 72 locations throughout the region.

Quick Facts:

- Since 2019, illicit fentanyl and its analogues were involved in more than 85 per cent of illicit drug toxicity deaths.
- In 2021, 375 people in Interior Health died due to drug toxicity. In 2022 250 people have died of toxic drug poisoning in Interior Health (Jan. 1 – Aug. 31).
- Fentanyl is often present in all opioid-type drugs, from pressed pills like Oxycodone and Percocet to “down” and heroin. It is also sometimes found in other drugs as well.
- 67.7 per cent of opioids checked from February to July 2022 contained benzodiazepines.
- Between July 2020 and August 2022 the benzodiazepine analog Etizolam was found in 38 per cent of illicit drug toxicity deaths.
- [Benzodiazepines](#) do not respond to naloxone and create challenges for first responders trying to reverse drug poisonings.

We recognize and acknowledge that we are collectively gathered on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the seven Interior Region First Nations. This region is also home to 15 Chartered Métis Communities. It is with humility that we continue to strengthen our relationships with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples across the Interior.

MEDIA, FOR INFORMATION:

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PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

For more information and to find a drug checking location near you visit drugchecking.ca. To reach an Interior Health Mental Health and Substance Use centre near you call 310-MHSU.

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