

BC's pandemic & epidemic: A stressful overlap for ambulance paramedics

Drug overdose patients have more known COVID19 risk factors

August 21, 2020, Vancouver, BC – With people returning to work and recreational activities, ambulance paramedics say call volumes have increased to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, drug overdose calls recently hit a record high and paramedics say treating these patients has become increasingly difficult because they have significantly more COVID19 risk factors than the general population.

“The overlap of a pandemic and epidemic is the kind of stress ambulance paramedics have never experienced. To reduce the risk of COVID19 exposure and ensure the safety of overdose patients and paramedics, treatment can take more time,” said Troy Clifford, president of Ambulance Paramedics of BC.

In a [study](#), the BC Centre for Disease Control found that drug users who experienced a non-fatal overdose had three of the four known risk factors associated with “serious” COVID19 illness compared to the general population:

- chronic pulmonary disease
- diabetes
- coronary heart disease

Strict new practices

To reduce risk of transmission and ensure everyone's safety, ambulance paramedics now use strict new clinical practices in treating overdose patients who are unconscious or in cardiac arrest, particularly when it comes to aerosol-generating treatment. Changes include:

- increased personal protective equipment requirements (beyond other calls)
- changes to CPR: how paramedics clear airways for resuscitation, including an option to use a newly introduced airway device called [iGel](#).
- using a now-mandatory device that filters a patient's breath on exhalation
- and performing resuscitation and treatment in well-ventilated spaces if possible

“Some of these new clinical procedures take more time and can be more complicated, all of which adds stress on top of paramedics witnessing the human toll of the overdose crisis which is impacting families across BC,” said Clifford.

Media interviews

Several frontline paramedics from different areas of BC, including Troy Clifford, can speak with the media about their experience with BC's overdose crisis, including the human toll they've witnessed, as well as the added stressors and new clinical practices.

Contact: Renu Bakshi 604 787 1873 or renu@renubakshi.com or Troy Clifford 250-319-4713 or Troy.Clifford@apbc.ca