

Info-MADO¹

Nunavik Public Health Department Newsletter on Notifiable Diseases

Call for vigilance

Risk of intoxications – Opioids overdoses

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Risk of overdose from opioid use

The Department of Public Health of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services has been informed that 1 mg tablets and 2 mg tablets of hydromorphone (Dilaudid[®]) may be in circulation in some communities in Nunavik.

Risk of death from opioid use

The most dangerous effect of an overdose of opioids, such as hydromorphone (Dilaudid[®]), is a significant slowing or even complete stop in breathing. It takes only three to five minutes for oxygen deprivation in the brain to cause permanent brain damage. If oxygen deprivation persists, it can lead to severe cognitive impairment, coma or even death.

Reminder for clinicians

The Department of Public Health asks clinicians and workers to be vigilant about the potential for overdose in their patients who use drugs and encourages them to use a harm-reduction intervention to prevent deaths in patients who use drugs:

1. Share information regarding the circulation of non-prescribed hydromorphone (Dilaudid[®]) in the region and the risks associated with its non-therapeutic use.
2. Provide counselling on reduced risk consumption practices:
 - a. Avoid using alone;
 - b. When many people are using, make sure that not everyone uses at the same time so that someone can monitor the others and watch them;
 - c. Reduce the dosage of the drug to test its effects;
 - d. Tell drug users about the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act, which provides immunity from prosecution for simple possession for overdose witnesses and suggest that they contact the police or CLSC for a quick intervention;
 - e. Refer people with opioid-related disorders to addiction treatment services if necessary.

¹ Transiator's note: French acronym for Reportable disease (Maladie à déclaration obligatoire)

Action plan

A copy of the *Plan d'action régional du Nunavik pour la prévention des surdoses aux opioïdes 2019-2022* is available for clinicians to consult. Here are the actions that are being put in place now to react in case of overdoses:

- The availability of 200 doses of naloxone in each of the 14 villages of Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay;
- Short training sessions on opioid overdoses for health professionals available to staff at both health centres;
- A public health surveillance and monitoring system for opioid overdoses in the process of being implemented in the two health centres.

Reporting to the Department of Public Health

The Department of Public Health encourages health care professionals to notify them of any suspected or confirmed opioid overdose situation, using the overdose reporting form provided for this purpose. The following situations should be reported:

- The overdose is presumed to be caused by opioids,
or
- A high number of people overdosed in a short period of time,
or
- The symptoms of overdose are very severe,
or
- The circumstances are unusual;
- Any other worrying situation related to the circulation of hydromorphone (Dilaudid[®]).

Analysis of the reports could lead to an epidemiological investigation by the Department of Public Health in order to describe the risk and to determine and implement the necessary measures to protect the health of the population.

To report:

Send the form by confidential fax at 1 866 867-8026

For information:

During office hours: Olivier Godin at **418 666-7000, ext. 10160**

Outside office hours: On-Call Public Health Doctor at
1 855 964-2244 (toll-free number) or at **1 819 299-2990** (alternate number in case of a problem with the toll-free number)