



January 13, 2017

To: BC Chief Medical Health Officers
Dr. Peter Rothfels, Director, Clinical Services & Chief Medical Officer, WorkSafe BC

Guidance statement regarding Personal Protective Equipment for Emergency Medical Services and Health Care Workers dealing with overdose victims

The purpose of this guidance document is to recognize the differing practices used by local law enforcement officials carrying out drug seizures and executing search warrants. This has created concern within British Columbia's health care community. This guidance statement is to recommend the appropriate level of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) required for guarding against secondary exposures to potentially harmful, illicit drugs in the health care setting

The risk of unintended fentanyl and fentanyl analogue exposures to Health Care Workers (HCWs) and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) staff treating overdose victims is extremely low. Unlike law enforcement, EMS and hospital medical staff are not exposed to environments where illicit drugs are being produced, transported or stored. In British Columbia, the epicenter of the Canadian opioid overdose epidemic, there have been no reported cases of secondary exposures of fentanyl to EMS, HCWs or private citizens administering naloxone, despite thousands of overdose reversals in the field and in health care facilities.

No additional Personal Protective Equipment is required when attending patients with drug exposures unless there is a risk of respiratory and/or bodily fluid exposure. The protective equipment used by law enforcement first responders and hazardous materials teams reflect contexts and risks beyond those found in the health care setting. While PPE, routine practices and additional precautions should continue to be used when there is a risk of respiratory and/or bodily fluid exposure, the additional practices and/or elevated levels of PPE used in other professions are not required at this time.

Further guidance on overdose management can be found on the following website:
http://towardtheheart.com/assets/naloxone/administering-naloxone-dst-final-december-2016_229.pdf

Further guidance for Fentanyl Safety for First Responders can be found at
<https://www.fentanylsafety.com/job-specific/>

Sincerely,

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Provincial Health Officer

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