

Brown powder sold as cocaine causes severe poisoning and one death

On 18 May 2018, the Direction de santé publique de la Montérégie – CISSS de la Montérégie-Centre issued a warning related to two cases of severe poisoning possibly related to consumption of a brown powder sold as cocaine (<https://bit.ly/2rPvCNs>). Impaired consciousness and muscle rigidity were noted in both cases, and one death was reported. An investigation is underway, but has yet to confirm the cause or causes of the severe poisoning, but preliminary results indicate that the substance used was not cocaine, but a mix of heroin and other potentially toxic substances. The drug may be circulating in Montréal.

Given the situation in Montérégie, the public health department at CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal is again asking its partners in the health network, community groups and peer associations to report any unusual overdose situations as quickly as possible, using the following tools:

Community groups: <https://bit.ly/2jvYru1>

Clinical settings: <https://bit.ly/2HQeS2P>

Montréal's public health department calls on drug users to be prudent, and encourages clinicians, care providers and peers to bolster interventions to prevent overdoses:

1. Disseminate information about the possibility of a brown powder being sold as cocaine in Montréal that can cause severe poisoning or death.
2. Offer counselling on lower-risk drug use practices:
 - for people who inject, go to a supervised injection site regularly (<https://www.santemontreal.qc.ca/en/public/support-and-services/supervised-injection-services/>)
 - avoid using alone
 - when using with other people, don't all use at the same time
 - reduce the amount used to test the effects
 - have naloxone close at hand, and know how to use it when someone shows signs of overdose
 - call 911 if someone overdoses (the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act provides immunity from simple possession charges for those who call 911 in the case of an overdose)
3. Inform people about naloxone and, if needed, go with them to get naloxone in any pharmacy listed on the Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux website (<http://sante.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoire-ressources/naloxone/>).
4. As needed, refer individuals with problems associated with opioid use to addiction treatment services.