June 26, 2020

Dear Harm Reduction Services Operator,

**Re: Providing Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Services in the Vancouver Coastal Health region during the COVID-19 pandemic**

In the context of the dual public health emergencies related to overdose and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital to restore access to harm reduction and overdose prevention services in order to prevent further overdose deaths. Community COVID-19 transmission is currently at low levels in the region and we believe that is possible to safely operate harm reduction and overdose prevention services at full capacity at this time.

Harm reduction and overdose prevention services should continue to screen clients upon arrival to identify those who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or who have returned to Canada following international travel or who have been in contact with a COVID case in the last 14 days. Individuals with symptoms should be referred for testing and offered a mask before entering the facility. Those with travel or exposure history should be offered a mask and referred to public health if they require support to self-isolate.

As we learn more about COVID-19 we have come to understand that the risk of virus aerosolization, even during aerosol generating medical procedures (AGMPs) such as CPR or ball valve mask ventilation, is extremely low and that almost any barrier placed over the client’s mouth and nose is sufficient to prevent the release of respiratory droplets into the air.

All sites are asked to follow BCCDC guidance for overdose response at overdose prevention and supervised consumption sites during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, please discontinue use of VCH Overdose Response in OPS and SCS and COVID guidance (issued on April 3, 2020).

The following changes to overdose response protocols are recommended in the BCCDC guidance:

- Resume the CPR and rescue breaths by placing a CPR face shield over the client’s mouth and nose during compressions and/or rescue breaths
- Discontinue clearing the space before performing an AGMP
- Discontinue closing sites for cleaning after an overdose and/or AGMP, simply open doors and windows to improve ventilation after an overdose response
- Discontinue cleaning around a specific perimeter after an overdose, resume routine cleaning practices
- Discontinue universal enhanced precautions for overdose response (ie N95s, gowns etc.) and return to standard PPE for direct care (procedure mask, gloves, eye protection) for asymptomatic clients
- Discontinue closing every other booth and resume normal operations.
Facility operators should continue following routine cleaning practices with enhanced cleaning of high-touch surfaces or shared equipment. Operators should ensure that handwashing or hand sanitizer stations are available and supplies well-stocked.

There may be additional measures related to the type of facility that operators can implement to further reduce the risk of COVID-19 such as modifying programs and services or making changes to the environment by installing hand sanitizer stations or physical barriers.

For assistance supporting a client to self-isolate please call the COVID Assessment Line 604-290-3208.

For advice on overdose response please contact Nancy Chow, Clinical Practice Lead at nancy.chow@vch.ca

For advice on infection prevention and control please contact rrt@vch.ca

Sincerely,

Mark Lysyshyn MD MPH FRCPC
Deputy Chief Medical Health Officer

Resources:

BCCDC Overdose Response Recommendations: BCCDC Responding to Opioid Overdoses in OPS and SCS

VCH COVID-19 information: http://www.vch.ca/covid-19


VCH COVID-19 Community Resources: https://sneezesdiseases.com/covid-19-community-resources