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Dear colleagues,

I am writing to share some concerning information regarding the toxic drug supply in Ontario, and recent exposures for people who use drugs.

First, last week information was shared regarding [a new drug that has been identified in the drug supply in Toronto](#): medetomidine/dexmedetomidine. This substance was identified in substances also containing opioids, and in some cases also containing benzodiazepines and xylazine. These substances may interact to increase the risk of harms. Exposure to medetomidine/dexmedetomidine may be associated with loss of consciousness, and potentially also cardiac and circulatory system depression and respiratory depression.

Second, since early this week there have been a substantial number of toxicity events requiring emergency medical care in Belleville within a narrow time period, leading Belleville to declare a state of emergency. The substance or substances involved in these toxicity events has not been identified yet, and these toxicity events may or may not be associated with medetomidine/dexmedetomidine. I understand that people presented clinically with decreased level of consciousness and in some cases required respiratory support, and some people showed partial response to naloxone administration. As far as I know, there have been no deaths reported in association with the toxicity events in Belleville this week.

In terms of urgent actions, we request that you share information about current risks of drug toxicity, which may be acutely increased in your jurisdiction from baseline, with appropriate stakeholders in your public health unit, including people who use drugs, emergency medical services, and community-based health and social services that work with people who use drugs. Specifically, we ask that you share messages regarding the risks of substance use, that anyone using any substance should have immediate access to naloxone, encourage people to not use drugs alone, and encourage people who use drugs to access a supervised setting such as a Consumption and Treatment Service, where available.

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In addition, we recognize the key role of partnerships in preventing and responding to acute drug toxicity events. We ask that you use this opportunity to review your response plans in the event of a large drug toxicity event, including processes in place to communicate and collaborate with your community drug strategy. Please ensure your local drug strategy committee is active and meeting regularly.

Yours truly,



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Chief Medical Officer of Health

c:

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