

Managing Withdrawal during COVID-19



Supporting our wellness during COVID-19

This fact sheet is part of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation's commitment to provide culturally-grounded and strength-based supports for First Nations people during COVID-19. These resources can provide guidance as our communities navigate the current global health crisis, while continuing to face existing health challenges, including substance use and mental health issues.

Colonization and residential schools have contributed to higher rates of mental health and substance use issues for First Nations compared to the general population in Canada.

Prolonged use of (opioid) drugs changes the way our brain functions. COVID-19 may affect drug access, which can cause extreme withdrawal symptoms, such as unbearable pain, nausea, and anxiety.

People become dependent on these drugs in order to avoid withdrawal symptoms and sometimes don't realize they've become dependent. They may mistake withdrawal for symptoms of the flu or another condition.

The symptoms will depend on the level of withdrawal. Multiple factors determine the extent of the symptoms and everyone experiences opioid withdrawal differently. However, there's typically a timeline for the progression of symptoms.

EARLY SYMPTOMS OF WITHDRAWAL

- muscle aches
- anxiety
- runny nose
- insomnia
- restlessness
- watery eyes
- excessive sweating
- yawning

Withdrawal symptoms can also intensify after day one. Some people can experience diarrhea, abdominal cramping, goose bumps, nausea and vomiting, dilated pupils and blurred vision, rapid heartbeat and high blood pressure.

HOW TO TREAT MILD WITHDRAWAL

- acetaminophen (Tylenol), or aspirin or other Non-steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs, such as Ibuprofen
- drink plenty of fluids with electrolytes such as vitamin water, or sports drinks (Gatorade)
- treat diarrhea with over the counter medications such as loperamide (Imodium)
- consider a prescription for hydroxyzine (Vistaral or Atarax), cannabis or over-the-counter medications such as Benadryl or Pepto-Bismol to treat nausea
- more intense withdrawal symptoms may require a prescription for clonidine (non-addicting medication) to reduce intensity of symptoms

If you use opioids in a harmful way, COVID-19 may affect your normal supply lines: travel/border restrictions, community check points and curfews.

Be prepared for involuntary withdrawal and have a plan that reduces harm to you and others.

1. Find a safe alternative supply source to prevent withdrawal.
2. Get medical and, or treatment help (i.e. drug substitution programs).
3. Contact a First Nations treatment facility near you.
4. Have all necessary medications, food and drinks (especially protein-based and electrolyte boosting liquids).
5. Reach out to Knowledge Holders for cultural supports.
6. Wean off of opioids and other drugs; similar steps can be taken to manage withdrawal for other drugs.

REFERENCES

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For more information, visit: thunderbirdpf.org/covid-19