

BENZODIAZEPINES in apparent drug toxicity deaths in Canada, 2018 to 2023

What are benzodiazepines?



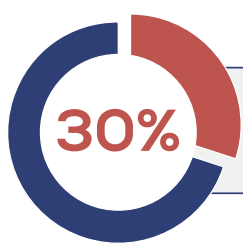
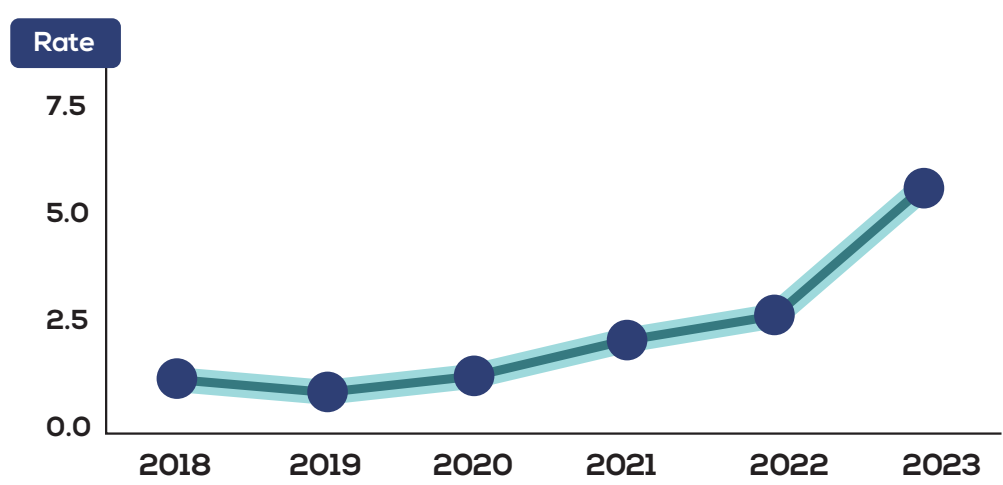
Benzodiazepines are a class of substances that slow down brain activity and are used to treat conditions such as anxiety, sleep disorders and seizures. Benzodiazepines are only legally available by prescription and should be consumed as recommended by a physician. Their use can lead to substance use disorder, overdose and death, especially when consumed with alcohol or other drugs.

Benzodiazepines contributing to more deaths in Canada

The rate of apparent **benzodiazepine** toxicity deaths increased by **~5 times** from

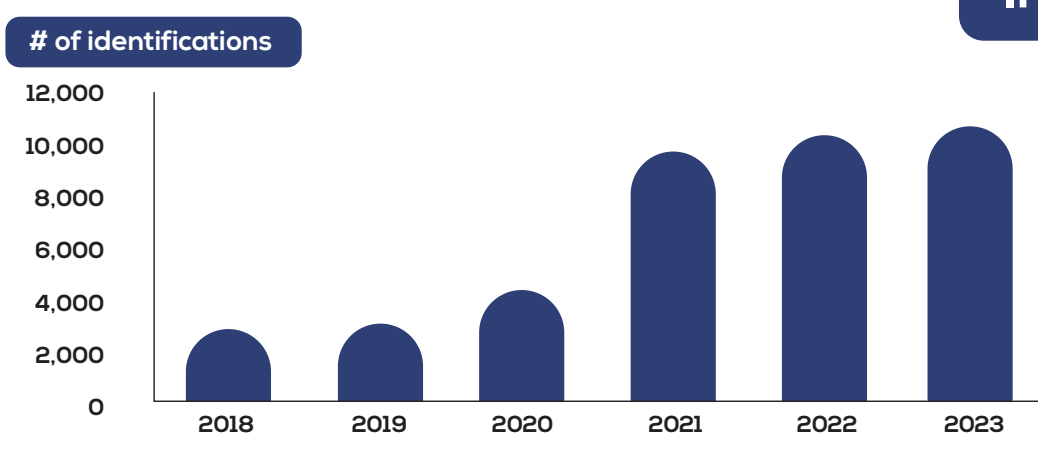
- ▶ **1.2 per 100,000 population** in 2018 to
- ▶ **5.6 per 100,000 population** in 2023

Over the same period, the rate of apparent **opioid** toxicity deaths increased by **~2 times**



30% of opioid-related deaths in 2023 also had benzodiazepines contributing to death, compared to 12% in 2018

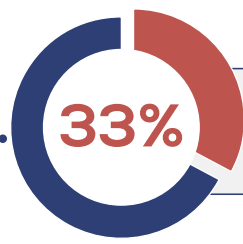
Increasing presence in toxic drug supply



In 2023, identifications of benzodiazepine from seized samples in Canada were almost



4 TIMES MORE OFTEN compared to 2018



33% of opioid samples also contained at least one benzodiazepine in 2023, compared to 7% in 2020

SOURCE:

The information presented in this report was obtained from six to eight provinces and territories through an ad hoc request to the data providers of the Substance-related Overdose and Mortality Surveillance Task Group (SOMS-TG) and is not a part of ongoing national surveillance activities.

Drug Analysis Service and Cannabis Laboratory. Ottawa: Health Canada; October 2024.

Findings presented here may differ from other data from the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service as these data are presented and analyzed in a different manner. Additional information about the work of the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service can be found here: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/drug-analysis-service/analyzed-drug-report.html>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Access to the information in this report would not be possible without the collaboration and dedication of P/T offices of Chief Coroners and Chief Medical Examiners as well as P/T public health and health partners and Public Health Officers.

REFERENCES:

Government of Canada. (2024). Status determination of benzodiazepines. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/mandate/regulatory-role/what-health-canada-regulates-1/controlled-substances-precursors/overview-substance-control-status-determination-process/benzodiazepines.html>

Government of Canada. (2024). Health Canada Drug Analysis Service.