

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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**For Immediate Release**  
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### **Text alerts for toxic drugs now available in the North**

In response to the toxic drug emergency, a new text health alert system has been launched across Northern Health.

The system uses text messaging to send alerts as a public health measure to prevent drug poisonings and deaths and provides timely information and up-to-date resources to people who use drugs and community members.

“As the toxic drug crisis continues to take lives, we need every tool in the toolbox to keep people safer,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “Drug alerts in Northern communities means that more people will be able to take advantage of this critical tool to reduce their risk of drug poisonings and death.”

Drug alerts play an important role in empowering people who use drugs to do so more safely. People who use drugs, those who support them, and community members are encouraged to opt-in for toxic drug alerts by texting the keyword JOIN to ALERTS (253787). They will receive toxic drug and drug poisoning alerts and public health alerts.

The Toxic Drug and Health Alerts system also allows subscribers to anonymously submit information that Harm Reduction teams can use to make alerts as informative as possible. This includes information such as the dates and locations of drug overdoses, physical descriptions of the drug and packaging, where the substance was purchased, and what it is believed to be – and can be submitted by texting using the keyword OD.

“The ability to incorporate the firsthand and witnessed knowledge of peers and partners, first responders and system subscribers is key to ensuring alerts are timely, and informative,” said Dr. Jong Kim, NH Chief Medical Health Officer. “It is our hope that this tool will further empower people who use substances to do so more safely, as part of the ongoing effort to reduce the rates of drug poisonings from an increasingly toxic supply of illicit drugs.”

Northern Health joins Interior, Fraser and Island Health in offering the new system, which health authorities have used to issue over 30 alerts since it was first launched by Interior Health in May 2022. Over 2300 subscribers are already using the system, developed by the BC Centre for Disease Control and the Office of Virtual Health at Provincial Health Services Authority in partnership with regional health authorities.

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