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October 21, 2016

Dear BC School Superintendents:

As I'm sure you are aware, British Columbia is experiencing a tragic illicit drug overdose crisis. Since January, we've lost 555 people in BC to these preventable deaths. Each of these deaths has left a mark on their communities, which is felt by the whole province and, understandably, parents and people who work with youth are wondering what they can do to keep kids safe.

I would like to reassure educators that youth aged 10-18 comprise a very small subset of fatal overdoses. This is not to say that youth of school age are not affected or not at risk, as there have been 8 illicit drug overdose deaths in youth between the ages of 15-18 so far in 2016.

In 2016 to date there have been no deaths in youth under age 15 and no deaths have occurred in a BC school. With this information, we looked carefully at the provision of naloxone, a medication that can reverse the effects of an overdose, in schools and as no overdoses have occurred in a BC school, we are not designating schools a high-risk environment.

If a school administrator knows that a school has a high risk population or is aware of students using drugs on or near school grounds, in addition to the referral and support protocols that the school may have, I recommend obtaining a naloxone kit for the school and ensuring a person is available who is comfortable administering it. Kits can be purchased behind the counter in many pharmacies for about \$50 and pharmacists can provide training.

Our focus for youth aged 10-18 is on prevention through better decision making, increasing awareness of naloxone and safer drug practices because we do know that this age group is experimenting. We recently launched a social media campaign with that as our goal and posters and TV ads will be appearing soon.

As well, Community Action Initiative – an organization that supports projects focused on mental health and substance use issues – has partnered with the Centre for Addictions Research of BC to develop curriculum for teachers and resources for parents. These resources will be made available on <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/overdose> a new provincial website with information on fentanyl, how to spot an overdose and how to respond to one.

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An incredible amount of work is underway to stop the increase in overdoses, and I know schools and school districts have several programs in place to increase awareness. With these efforts in place, I am hopeful we'll begin to see a decline in these unnecessary tragedies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P.R.W. Kendall", written over a solid horizontal line.

P.R.W. Kendall
OBC, MBBS, MHSc, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer