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# Schools and the drug crisis

By Peter Small, AdvocateDaily.com Contributor



Canada's largest school board should do more than just order naloxone kits if it believes students are in danger of overdosing on opioids, says Toronto criminal lawyer [Jordana Goldlist](#).

"I have to query whether or not there is an opiate crisis in high school, and if there is, shouldn't we be doing something to address why?" she tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#).

The Toronto District School Board has announced it will supply naloxone kits, which can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose, to more than 100 of its high schools, [Canadian Press](#) reports.

A board spokesperson said no particular emergency prompted the move. He called it a preventative step so that staff will have the training and the kits to help students if something happens, according to the article.

But Goldlist, principal of [JHG Criminal Law](#), says if the school board is so concerned about possible overdoses that it is ordering the life-saving kits, it should also be stepping up efforts to educate students about the dangers of these drugs.

"What are we doing to help prevent not just overdoses, but opiate addiction?" she asks.

Across the country, at least 1,460 people died from opioid-related overdoses in the first half of 2017, according to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

The opioid family of drugs includes oxycodone, morphine, heroin and the synthetic painkiller fentanyl.

In 2016, fentanyl became the drug most commonly involved in Toronto's overdose deaths, the [Canadian Press](#) article says.

Goldlist says fentanyl is normally linked to hard-core street use by the seriously addicted, not the casual recreational use associated with students.

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“It’s not a ‘party’ drug,” she says. “It’s not socially acceptable by any means. The fact that it’s entrenched in high schools already and that we have to have anti-overdose kits, I find frightening.”

A survey released in December 2017 by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health found that almost one per cent of respondents from Grades 9 to 12 — the equivalent of about 5,800 students across Ontario — reported having taken illicit fentanyl in the previous year, according to another [Canadian Press report](#).

Goldlist takes no issue with the roughly \$20,000 that the school board will spend on the kits, but asks what is being done to combat the problem at the outset.

“If we are going to be spending \$150 to \$200 a kit to put them into the schools, what are we doing to address the underlying issues that are causing young kids 15, 16 and 17 to use fentanyl?” Goldlist asks.

“Does this require a little more time spent on harm reduction and education?” she says. “Are we looking at why kids are going the route of using serious drugs at such a young age? Why are we not preventing kids from having opioid addictions in the first place?”

Goldlist notes that as the overdose crisis has deepened, the price of some naloxone kits has shot up from \$3 to \$5 apiece 10 years ago to \$150-\$200 today.

"The profit margin has gone through the roof," she says.

According to the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), a two-dose package of the naloxone auto-injector Evzio was priced at US\$690 in 2014 but rose to US\$4,500 in 2017, an increase of more than 500 per cent.

Whatever the price, naloxone kits are at best a Band-Aid solution, Goldlist says.

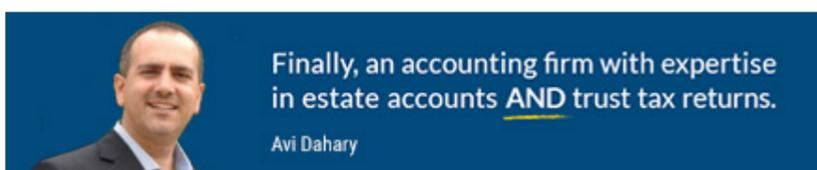
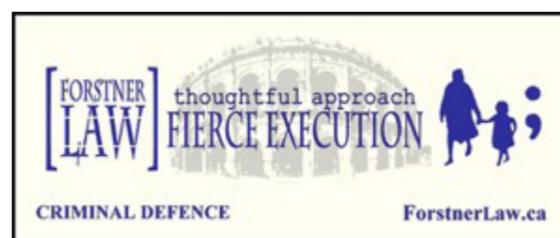
“We’re not necessarily looking to solve the underlying issues,” she says. “We’re setting up a generation that’s going to end up allowing the pharmaceutical companies to profit even further than they have so far from this crisis.”

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