Canada opioid deaths reach new monthly high

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Deaths from drug overdoses in November hit a new high in Canada's British Columbia province, epicenter of a raging national opioid crisis, health officials said on Monday.

A total of 128 people died as a result of illicit drug use in the month, an average of four deaths per day.

The previous high, set in January, was 82. Fentanyl has been detected in about 60 percent of cases this year, up from two percent in 2012.

"November saw the most tragic number of deaths so far this year," British Columbia Health Minister Terry Lake said in a statement.

Canada and the United States have been struggling to contain the sudden spike in opioid overdose deaths, pouring tens of millions of dollars into bolstering public health emergency responses, with little effect.

Morgues in British Columbia are at capacity.

Public health officials have distributed nearly 18,000 naloxone kits to addicts to treat emergency narcotic overdoses and opened pop-up consumption rooms in at-risk neighborhoods.

The city of Vancouver, meanwhile, voted recently to raise property taxes by 0.5 percent to fund a bigger response to the crisis.

The federal government also has ordered increased customs searches for fentanyl and partnered with China to stem its flow into Canada.

Highly potent and addictive, the analgesic fentanyl is estimated to be up to 100 times stronger than morphine. The related drug carfentanil is 100 times more powerful than fentanyl.

Two milligrams of pure fentanyl—the size of about four grains of salt—is enough to kill an average-size adult.

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