



## CCENDU Bulletin

### Drug-related Harms at Canadian Music Festivals

#### Summary

- Between June and August 2014, at least five young adults died while attending Canadian music festivals; many more individuals were treated onsite or admitted to hospital.
- It is suspected that drug use was a contributing factor in these deaths and illnesses.
- The CCENDU network attempted to compile detailed reliable information on drug-related deaths and illnesses that occurred at these festivals; however, investigations are ongoing and as of September 2014 very little information is available.
- A complete description of drug-related deaths and illnesses that occurred during the 2014 Canadian music festival season is warranted when the information becomes available.
- There is a need to discuss and review practices for preventing and responding to drug-related deaths and illnesses at these music festivals.
- CCENDU and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) are interested in collaborating with partners to assemble and share this information. Anyone who has information or is interested in becoming involved should contact [CCENDU@ccsa.ca](mailto:CCENDU@ccsa.ca).

#### Background

Summer music festivals are held throughout Canada every year. These festivals are often large, with as many as 70,000 tickets sold. Media reports indicate that between June and August 2014, many festival attendees were treated onsite by volunteer or contracted medical services, and a large number were transported to hospital for alcohol and other drug-related health issues. There have also been at least five deaths (19–24 years of age) in which alcohol and/or other drug use is suspected to be a contributing factor. These deaths occurred in Toronto (Veld)<sup>1,2,3</sup> and Ottawa (Escapade),<sup>4</sup> Ontario, and in Penticton (Boonstock)<sup>2,5,6,7</sup> and Pemberton (Pemberton Music Festival),<sup>1,8</sup> British Columbia. Other deaths have also occurred at large music festivals in the United States (Ultra Music Festival)<sup>9</sup> and elsewhere (Future Music Festival; Glastonbury Festival).<sup>10,11</sup>

As of September 2014, there are many unanswered questions about these deaths and illnesses as investigations are ongoing. A complete description of drug-related deaths and illnesses occurring at large summer music festivals in Canada is warranted.

There does not appear to be any consistent national or provincial guidelines, or specific language within existing guidelines, aimed at preventing and responding to drug-related overdoses at these events. In many jurisdictions in Canada, permits for events and festivals are granted municipally, without a requirement for consistent minimum standards for health and safety. It is important to discuss and review practices for preventing and responding to drug-related deaths and illnesses at Canadian music festivals.



## Call to Action

In response, CCENDU and CCSA have begun:

- Collecting information on drug-related deaths and illnesses that have occurred at Canadian summer music festivals; and
- Assembling a group of experts to identify lessons learned and to help inform the development of recommendations for preventing, preparing for, and responding to drug-related overdoses at large festivals.

We wish to complete these initiatives and release a comprehensive report of findings. Anyone who has information to share or who is interested in being involved in these initiatives should contact [CCENDU@ccsa.ca](mailto:CCENDU@ccsa.ca).

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<sup>1</sup> Posadzki, A. (2014, August 15). Taking a trip to a different kind of music festival, for safety's sake. *Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/taking-a-trip-to-a-different-kind-of-music-festival/article20081824>.

<sup>2</sup> Hudes, S. (2014, August 5). 'People were picking pills on the ground': Toronto police searching for drug samples after Veld deaths, *National Post*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/08/05/police-seek-video-and-photos-from-toronto-music-festival-where-two-died-from-suspected-drug-overdose>.

<sup>3</sup> Humphreys, A., & Hudes, S. (2014, August 6). Who were the young people who died apparently from tainted drugs at music festivals? *National Post*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/08/06/who-were-the-young-people-who-died-apparently-from-tainted-drugs-at-music-festivals>.

<sup>4</sup> Yogaretnam, S. (2014, July 6). Nothing to connect rave drug incidents, police say. *Ottawa Citizen*. Retrieved from <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/nothing-to-connect-rave-drug-incidents-police-say>.

<sup>5</sup> Herald, P. (2014, August 11). Boonstock attendees resent city councillor's 'headbanging druggies' label. *The Province*. Retrieved from <http://www.theprovince.com/entertainment/Boonstock+attendees+resent+headbanging+druggies+label/10109113/story.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Judd, A. (2014, August 4). Safety concerns arise following death of festivalgoer at Boonstock in Penticton. *Global News*. Retrieved from <http://globalnews.ca/news/1489692/safety-concerns-arise-following-death-of-festivalgoer-at-boonstock-in-penticton>.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn Tolocka, Boonstock Music Festival attendee, died day before birthday. (2014, August 5). *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/08/05/lynn-tolocka-boonstock-music-festival-died-birthday\\_n\\_5651980.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/08/05/lynn-tolocka-boonstock-music-festival-died-birthday_n_5651980.html).

<sup>8</sup> Coppin, R. (2014, July 19). Pemberton Music Festival: Regina man Nick Phongsavath, 21, found dead. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/pemberton-music-festival-regina-man-nick-phongsavath-21-found-dead-1.2712203>.

<sup>9</sup> Smiley, D. (2014, August 2). Ultra Music Festival bans minors. *Miami Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/09/02/4323276/ultra-music-festival-bans-minors.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Safi, M. (2014, March 17). Future Music festival abandoned after up to six suspected drug deaths. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/17/future-music-festival-abandoned-after-up-to-six-suspected-drug-deaths>.

<sup>11</sup> Glastonbury 2014: festivalgoer dies after suspected ketamine reaction. (2014, June 27). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/27/glastonbury-festivalgoer-dies-suspected-ketamine-reaction>.

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The Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU) is a nation-wide network of community level partners who share information about local trends and emerging issues in substance use and exchange knowledge and tools to support more effective data collection.

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