

Understanding Risk Mitigation & Opioid Use Disorder Practice Update

In response to the compounding impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the harms of the illicit drug supply and the overdose emergency in BC, the BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU), Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA), and Ministry of Health (MoH) rapidly developed an interim clinical guidance document for [Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Pandemics in March 2020](#). In addition to outlining measures to support ongoing access to care during the COVID-19 pandemic, the document includes guidance on prescribing pharmaceutical alternatives to illicit drugs in order to support individuals at risk of withdrawal or overdose to self-isolate or quarantine to reduce COVID-19 transmission.

After over a year of *Risk Mitigation* prescribing experience, the emergence of preliminary evaluation data and experience from clinicians and people who use drugs has led to the development of an update to [Interim Clinical Guidance: Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Health Emergencies](#), which features expanded and amended guidance for mitigating substance-related risks in the context of COVID-19.

The clinical experience from *Risk Mitigation* prescribing also informed the development of an [Opioid Use Disorder Practice Update](#). This document helps to enact, but is distinct from, [Access to Prescribed Safer Supply in British Columbia: Policy Direction](#) which was released in July 2021 by the MMHA, MoH, and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer.

An overview of the purpose and scope of each of these documents is provided below.

Document	Developed By	Purpose	Key Content
Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Health Emergencies: Update	BCCSU	Provides updated guidance on <i>Risk Mitigation</i> prescribing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Not intended to guide the treatment of substance use disorders	Updated document includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example clinical scenarios • Guidance on patient planning beyond initial medication trial
Opioid Use Disorder: Practice Update	BCCSU	Outlines new evidence and clinical experience to help guide clinical management and harm reduction interventions for individuals with opioid use disorder.	Consists of two sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated guidance on the provision of opioid agonist treatment (OAT), including information on new OAT medication formulations and updated induction and dosing protocols • Overview of experience from over a year of <i>Risk Mitigation</i> prescribing of opioids, and guidance on prescribing certain opioids as a harm reduction option outside of the context of COVID-19
Access to Prescribed Safer Supply in British Columbia: Policy Direction	The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, Ministry of Health, and Office of the Provincial Health Officer	Policy directive that urges and facilitates the development of procedures and programs for the prescription of pharmaceutical alternatives to illicit drugs as a means of reducing the risk of illicit drug toxicity death	Key content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility of implementing programs for prescribed safer supply utilizing existing regional health authority-run and federally-funded programs • Outlines key objectives and overarching principles prescribed safer supply