

July 26, 2024

Via Email: Abid.Mavani@gov.ab.ca

Mr. Abid Mavani
Fatality Inquiry Coordinator
Justice and Solicitor General
9th Floor Peace Hills Trust Tower
10011-109 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3S8

Dear Abid:

RE: Eliana Rice (E.R.) – Public Fatality Inquiry, Response to Recommendation

Thank you for providing the Honourable Judge T.D. DePoe's report. This letter is to provide a response to the one recommendation directed at Alberta Health Services (AHS).

Recommendation

The court would recommend that new mothers be advised not only of the issues raised by the use of toxic substances, including illicit drugs, by them, and the consequent impact on their child and their ability to parent, but also the dangers of their use and mere presence in the home of an infant.

Response

AHS **accepts** this recommendation.

This recommendation was accepted to ensure critical patient safety messages regarding illicit drugs are provided to expectant parents, parents and caregivers of children from 0-6 years of age through providing more clear guidance that ingestion of an illicit drug can have serious consequences for a newborn and can even be fatal. This is of particular importance given the ongoing illicit drug use-related poisoning/overdose public health emergency in Canada.¹

Upon review of AHS educational resources for parents, we have identified messaging that can be enhanced to include additional harm reduction information regarding illicit drug use, environmental safety, and risks of exposure to infants and children. AHS has reviewed and identified educational resources for parents where enhanced messaging related to harm reduction information regarding illicit drug use, environmental safety, and risks of exposure to infants and children can be included.

The following information will be included in the identified resources during the next scheduled review and/or print cycle:

Exposure to even a tiny amount of any drugs, including ecstasy, methamphetamines, cocaine, heroin, and fentanyl, can make your baby or child very sick. Exposure can happen in different ways, like:

- *breathing in second-hand smoke or vapour from drugs*
- *being exposed through breastfeeding or breastmilk*

- *transferring from clothing, hands, or skin to a baby or child's body, toys, soothers, bottles, and other items*
- *during diaper changes*
- *accidentally eating or touching drugs*

Babies and children are in contact with their caregivers and everything in their environment, so exposure can happen in many places, like:

- *in your home and other homes*
- *in vehicles*
- *in public places*
- *in parks and playgrounds*

Keep all drugs and drug-related items, like bongos, pipes, lighters, needles, spoons, and fentanyl patches, locked up, out of sight, and out of reach of children. Anyone who comes in contact with drugs or drug-related items should:

- *wash their hands before handling or feeding a baby or child*
- *wash their hands before touching toys or other items*
- *change their clothes before handling a baby or child*

*Call 911 **now** if you think your child has been exposed to drugs.*

Death from exposure to opioids is preventable. If you think a baby or child has been exposed to opioids like heroin or fentanyl, naloxone is safe to give to anyone at any age.

If you're concerned about your own or someone else's drug use, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also call the Addiction Helpline anytime, day or night, at 1-866-332-2322, or visit Addiction and Mental Health.

Albertans can also access the Opioid Recovery Program anywhere in the province. Call 1-844-383-7688 for resources and supports in your community.

Thank you again for providing the Honourable Judge T.D. DePoe's report and recommendation. At AHS, we strive to continuously improve our health system and provide high-quality healthcare for all Albertans.

Sincerely,



Dr. Peter Jamieson
Vice President Quality and Chief Medical Officer
Alberta Health Services



Dr. Sid Viner
Vice President & Medical Director, Clinical Operations
Alberta Health Services

cc: Athana Mentzelopoulos, Chief Executive Officer, Alberta Health Services

¹Federal, provincial, and territorial Special Advisory Committee on the Epidemic of Opioid Overdoses. Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; March 2024. <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>