



MEDIA RELEASE

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Knox County Forensic Center Releases 2021 Drug-Related Death Report

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.— Today, the Knox County Regional Forensic Center released its 2021 Drug-Related Death Report for Knox and Anderson Counties. The report includes data on drug-related death cases the Center investigated from 2012-2021 and is shared to advance the discussion regarding addiction.

“2021 was a tough year for a lot of people,” said Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs. “Sadly, many of those battling addiction were without the help and support they needed, and the numbers in this report reflect that.”

The number of overdose deaths in Knox County increased 29 percent in 2021 on top of a 41 percent increase in 2020. In Anderson County, drug overdose deaths increased 67 percent in 2021 on top of an 81 percent increase in 2020.

Mixed drug intoxications led the way, but fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and some of the novel synthetic opioids continue to be the most abused drugs. Among the stimulants, methamphetamine is the drug of choice either alone or in combination with opioids.

“Last year we elaborated on the new novel synthetic drugs,” said Dr. Darinka Mileusnic-Polchan, Chief Medical Examiner. “There are more of them on the market this year and they are deadlier than ever—alone or in combination with other drugs. Snorting and/or intravenous drug abuse continue to be the predominant modes of intake in drug intoxication deaths.”

Dr. Mileusnic-Plochan continued: “It is disheartening to see that many of the deceased individuals had gone through different drug rehabilitation programs and facilities more than once only to go back to their previous ways shortly after the last session.”

“The overdose epidemic in Knox County, like across the nation, continues to grow in magnitude and new stronger drugs are making it worse,” said Chris Thomas, Director of the Knox County Regional Forensic Center. “Preliminary data for drug-deaths in 2022 unfortunately indicates an even more upward trend for drug-related death cases in Knox County.”

As outlined in the full text of the report, the data is drawn only from drug-related deaths in Knox and Anderson Counties between 2012 and 2021 that were investigated by the medical examiner. Some key findings from the report include:

- Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues (synthetic opioids) were the most frequently identified drugs in drug-related deaths in 2021.

- Polypharmacy, which is when more than one drug is responsible for death, was involved in 76 percent of Knox County's and 76 percent of Anderson County's overdose deaths.
- The five most common drugs identified in drug-related deaths in 2021 were synthetic opioids, methamphetamine, diphenhydramine alcohol/ethanol, and cocaine.
- Prescription opioid-related deaths continue to decrease in the Regional Forensic Center jurisdictions.
- People 34-44 years experienced the most drug deaths in Knox County, but the sharpest increase was in individuals age 55 to 64.
- The presence of anxiety, Anti-depressants and anti-psychotic medication was found in 30% of all drug deaths in Knox County and 38% of all drug deaths in Anderson County.

The full report is available [here](#).

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