



MEDIA RELEASE

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Knox County Forensic Center 2022 Reports Released

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.— The Knox County Regional Forensic Center (RFC) today released its 2022 Annual report as well as the Drug-Related Death Report for Knox and Anderson Counties.

The annual report provides an extensive overview of RFC facilities, staff, and cases. The Drug-Related Death Report includes data on drug-related death cases the Center investigated in 2022 along with comparisons to previous years.

“There are some hard realities represented in this report, and we need to pay attention,” said Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs. “It isn’t all bad news, though, as we continue to see a downward trend in prescription opioid-related deaths in Regional Forensic Center jurisdictions.”

As outlined in the full text of the report, the data from the drug-related death report is drawn only from drug-related deaths in Knox and Anderson Counties between 2012 and 2022 that were investigated by the medical examiner. Some key findings from the report include:

- Suicide increased by 30%, which is the largest increase among manners of death.
- There were 544 overdose deaths in 2022, which is a two percent increase from the previous year—with fentanyl and fentanyl analogues (synthetic opioids) were most frequently identified in drug-related deaths in 2022.
- The presence of anxiety, anti-depressants, and anti-psychotic medication was found in 22% of Knox County drug deaths and 18% of those in Anderson County.
- The five most common drugs identified in drug-related deaths in 2022 were synthetic opioids, cocaine, alcohol/ethanol, xylazine, and methamphetamine, which is the stimulant of choice and is used both on its own or in combination with opioids.
- Polypharmacy, identifying more than one drug as responsible for death, occurred in 65 percent of Knox County’s overdose deaths and 62 percent of Anderson County’s.
- Drug deaths occurred most frequently for people aged 34- to 44-years-old in Knox County, but the sharpest increase was in individuals aged 15- to 24-years-old.
- A new drug, xylazine, is ranked among the top 10 drugs involved in death; more information may be found in the report.

“The overdose epidemic continues to grow in Knox County, and across the nation,” said Chris Thomas, Director of the Knox County Regional Forensic Center. “Unfortunately, preliminary data for 2023 already indicates drug-related deaths will continue to trend upward.”

“There are more novel synthetic drugs on the market this year and they are deadlier than ever, alone or in combination with other drugs,” said Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Darinka Mileusnic-Polchan. “Many of the individuals we saw at the RFC had gone through different drug rehabilitation programs, sometimes more than once. It may be time to reevaluate the programs and measures used to combat drug-related deaths.”

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

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