



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Michael J. Allen, District Attorney

Colorado's 4th Judicial District - Serving El Paso & Teller Counties

El Paso County Coroner's Office 2021 Drug Related Death Data

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Drug related death data from the El Paso County Coroner's Office - 2021 saw a 22% increase in drug-related deaths over 2020 in El Paso County, CO. These are 227 lives lost to accidental drug overdoses and intoxications in our community. This increase was driven in large part by a more than doubling of fentanyl deaths (47 in 2020) to 99 in 2021. In 2017, El Paso County had a total of 5 fentanyl related deaths. In the subsequent 5 years, we have seen a more than doubling of fentanyl deaths year-after-year to reach 2021's total of 99 fentanyl-related accidental deaths. In addition, there were two fentanyl-related suicides in 2021 bringing the total lives lost to fentanyl in our community to 101. The rapid increase in deaths as well as the young age of the victims is what separates this drug epidemic from previous waves. 2021 saw 5 children lost to fentanyl, ages 1, 5, 15, and two 17-year-olds. The mean age of fentanyl deaths is 12 years younger (age 35) than the average age of all other drug-related deaths (age 47). This shift to a younger population is due in part to the current pill form that is easily trafficked and ingested, its widespread contamination of other drugs of abuse, its high toxicity even in small amounts, and its pervasiveness in the community, exposing even toddlers to fentanyl. In the majority of deaths (55%), fentanyl was present with other drugs of abuse suggesting clandestine contamination of other drugs with fentanyl. This was most seen in combinations with methamphetamine and cocaine. Unfortunately, if these trends continue through the first quarter of 2022, we are on pace to eclipse last year's total with over 100 deaths, including 2 minors already year to date.

Methamphetamine deaths increased by 18% over 2020 to 107 with 25% of those deaths occurring in the presence of fentanyl. In only 5% of accidental drug deaths were the drugs prescribed to the decedent by their physician which represents a decrease from the height of the prescription opioid crisis. 71% percent of all drug deaths were male and those with a known history of prior substance abuse or addiction decreased 6% from 2020 further indicating that the rise of fentanyl is killing more users new to substance use and abuse. 38% percent of drug-related deaths had THC metabolites present at autopsy compared to 23% of all cases autopsied at the coroner's office.



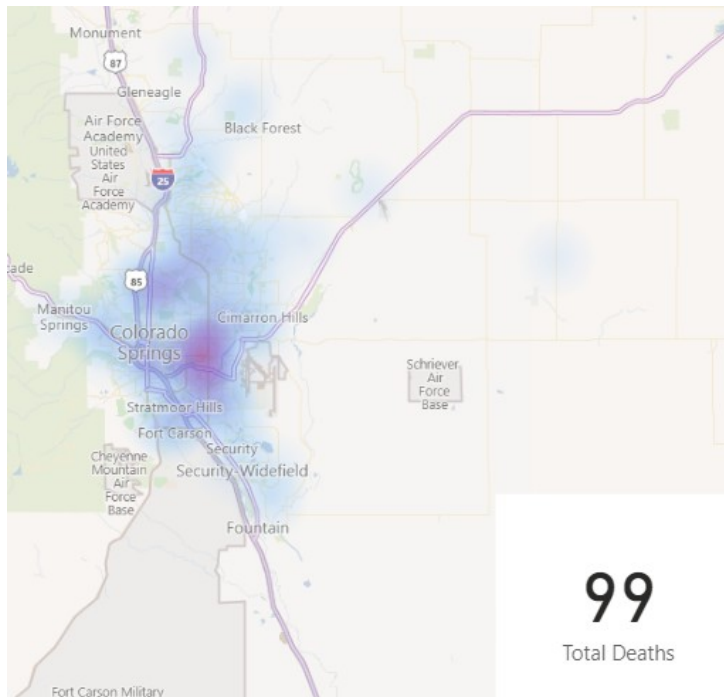
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With assistance from the El Paso County Public Health Department's Office of Data and Analytics, fentanyl death maps based on El Paso County Coroner data have been created to identify hot spots of fentanyl use. These incidence maps are the locations at which decedents were found or those overdosing were transported from before subsequently dying. The first is a heat map based on these addresses that indicate the density of deaths. The second is a cluster map based on zip codes. Neither are corrected for population but are useful in identifying the sites individuals have used and could suggest areas of investment in prevention including education and outreach to potential victims as well as increased efforts against trafficking.

Dr Kelly will be available for interviews at the conclusion of the Fentanyl Townhall. Centennial Hall – April 20, 2022, 5:00PM.



Fentanyl deaths heat map based on location

99
Total Deaths

Zip code cluster map of fentanyl deaths

