



MEDIA RELEASE

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Knox County Forensic Center Releases 2023 Drug-Related Death Report

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.— The Knox County Regional Forensic Center (RFC) today released its 2023 Annual report as well as the Drug-Related Death Report for Knox and Anderson Counties.

The annual report provides an extensive overview of the RFC facilities, staff, and cases. The Drug-Related Death Report includes data on drug-related death cases the Center investigated in 2023 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, but we still have a long way to go.”

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 2019 and 2023 that were investigated by the medical examiner. Some key findings from the report include:

- Motor Vehicle deaths increased by 35 percent, which is the largest increase among causes of death.
- There were 519 overdose deaths in 2023, which is a 5 percent decrease from the previous year – with fentanyl and fentanyl analogues (synthetic opioids) most frequently identified in drug-related deaths in 2023.
- The presence of anxiety, anti-depressants, and anti-psychotic medication was found in 22 percent of Knox County drug deaths.
- The five most common drugs identified in drug-related deaths in 2023 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 71 percent of Knox County’s overdose deaths.
- Drug deaths occurred most frequently for people ages 34 to 44 in Knox County, but the sharpest increase occurred in individuals ages 15 to 24.
- A new drug, bromazolam, is ranked among the top 10 drugs involved in death; more information may be found in the report.

“The overdose epidemic continues to be a concern even with the drop in cases in Knox County, and across the nation,” said Chris Thomas, Director of the Knox County Regional Forensic Center. “Fortunately, preliminary data for 2024 indicates drug-related deaths could continue trending downward.”

Said Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Darinka Mileusnic-Polchan: “There are more novel synthetic drugs on the market this year and they are deadlier than ever, alone or in combination with other drugs. Many of the individuals we saw at the RFC had gone through different drug rehabilitation programs, sometimes more than once.”

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

To schedule an interview with RFC officials, please reach out to Chris Thomas at chris.thomas@knoxcounty.org or call 865-215-8004 (office) or 865-257-7915 (cell).

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