



OFFICE OF THE CORONER

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NEWS RELEASE

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El Paso County Coroner's Office Releases 2020 Annual Report

El Paso County, CO – Today Dr. Leon Kelly, El Paso County Coroner, presented the Coroner's Office 2020 Annual Report to the El Paso County Board of Commissioners.

The Coroner's Office, which in 2020 consisted of five board-certified forensic pathologists, nine death investigators, four toxicologists, one histologist, five morgue technicians, and two administrative staff, investigates all sudden, unexpected, and non-natural deaths.

“It takes people like you and other community leaders to make changes that allow the next generation to live better, fuller, happier lives,” Dr. Kelly said. “And that’s why I’m here today, to present this information to you, so that you and others in the community have the truth about what is going on.”

Key takeaways from the 2020 report include:

- 6,037 total cases investigated
- 1,293 total autopsies performed (a nine percent increase over 2019)
 - 920 autopsies performed on El Paso County deaths
 - 373 autopsies performed for 21 surrounding counties

Top themes from the 2020 report include:

- Overall, deaths increased in nearly every category
- The total number of all drug-related deaths increased significantly from 130 in 2019 to 186 in 2020. Of note, 40 percent of deaths were due to a combination of substances.
 - Fentanyl deaths increases from 21 in 2019 to 47 in 2020
 - Methamphetamine deaths increased from 66 in 2019 to 91 in 2020
 - Cocaine deaths increased from 20 in 2019 to 30 in 2020
 - Heroin deaths increased from 35 in 2019 to 43 in 2020
- While suicides overall did not see an increase in El Paso County (180 in 2019 compared to 178 in 2020), suicides among youth between the ages of 11-17 increased significantly (nine in 2019 compared to 15 in 2020)
 - Of note, investigations revealed 18 cases where COVID-19 associated grief or stress was a driving factor in the suicide
 - Across all suicides, the average age at death was 42, and 79 percent of completed suicides were male
- There were 13 COVID-19 deaths brought in for autopsy. However, it’s important to note that the majority of COVID-19 deaths occur in a hospital or care facility setting and are not investigated by the Coroner. The deaths in this report represent those that died at home or prior to diagnosis.

Behavioral health and suicide prevention resources

The El Paso County Coroner's Office and El Paso County Public Health work closely together to look at the top issues facing our residents and identify upstream solutions and community-driven strategies to create a broader collective impact.

There are a number of resources available for community members, in addition to ways to get involved in prevention efforts:

- **Youth Suicide Prevention Workgroup**
 - El Paso County Public Health convenes the Youth Suicide Prevention Workgroup, a coalition of nearly 90 community partners taking collective action in support of youth mental health and suicide prevention. For more information, [click here](#).
- **Protecting youth from suicide: a resource written by local parents for all parents**
 - For tips and resources for parents, [click here](#)
- **Responding to behavioral health concerns in El Paso County**
 - For a comprehensive list of behavioral health resources in El Paso County, [click here](#)

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