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El Paso County Coroner's Office 2019 Annual Report

Medico-legal Death Investigation

❖ State level mandates to investigate deaths falling under specified jurisdictions and determine

- **Cause** and **Manner** of death
- Determine the **identity** of decedent
- Determine time of death and **how injury occurred**
- Collect **evidence** from the body used to prove or disprove an individual's guilt or innocence
- Confirm or deny the account of how the death occurred
- Determine or exclude other **contributory or causative** factors to the death
- Provide expert **testimony**
- Grant or deny tissue for **harvest**

❖ Two types of systems

❖ **Coroner**

❖ Medical Examiner

What Deaths are Investigated?

Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S) 30-10-606 mandate that the following deaths are reported to and investigated by the coroner:

- // Sudden, unexpected, or non-natural
- // No physician available to certify the death
- // Industrial accidents
- // Deaths in the custody of law enforcement or in the care of a public institution
- // Deaths due to contagious diseases
- // All unexplained deaths

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Total Investigations and Autopsies

TOTAL DEATHS INVESTIGATED

4816

TOTAL AUTOPSIES PERFORMED

1191

Average time to completion

The average number of days from autopsy to report completion during 2019 was **21 days**. This is a decrease from 32 days in 2018. **14 cases** (1%) took **greater than 60 days** to complete due to their complexity or ongoing investigation. This surpasses the national standard of >90% of cases completed within 60 days.

206

206 cases in 2019 were **“external only”** examinations, in which the cause and manner are well established by the external examination* and a thorough medical history.

13

13 of the 2019 examinations were **partial autopsies** and typically consisted of “head only” examinations to ensure that head trauma didn’t cause or contribute to death.

972

972 Examinations included a full internal exam in which each organ and body cavity is examined and is considered a **complete autopsy**.

91%

91% of cases had **toxicology testing** performed. Samples are nearly always collected, but testing may not be performed at the discretion of the physician

588

588 El Paso County deaths required **death scene investigation**



El Paso County Coroner’s Office does not perform **Hospital Autopsies**.

0

The El Paso County Coroner’s Office did not perform any **exhumations** in 2019

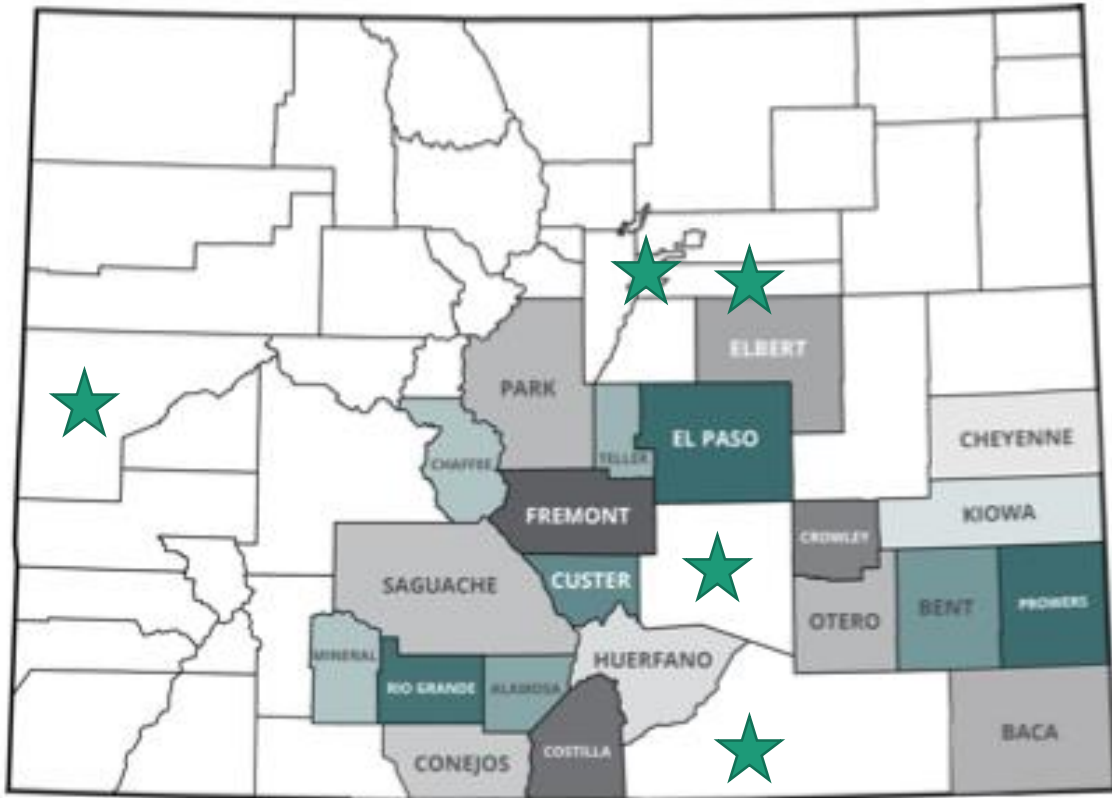
El Paso County Citizen Cost Breakdown

2019 Population*	720,403
Total 2019 Budget	\$2,852,324
\$2,852,324	(Budget)
- \$695,050.39	(Revenue)
<hr/>	
\$2,157,273.61	Overall Cost to Citizens
÷ 720,403	(Population)
= \$2.99	Annual cost to each El Paso County Citizen

*US Census Bureau (2019)

†This represents an 21% increase in revenue over 2018

Breakdown of Autopsies Performed



ALAMOSA	29	59	FREMONT
BACA	2	14	HUERFANO
BENT	18	2	KIOWA
CHAFFEE	40	6	MINERAL
CHEYENNE	2	28	OTERO
CONEJOS	14	22	PARK
COSTILLA	16	11	PROWERS
CROWLEY	7	19	RIO GRANDE
CUSTER	12	17	SAGUACHE
EL PASO	816	37	TELLER
ELBERT	20		

1,191 - TOTAL CASES

Manners of Death

Natural - Deaths due solely to disease or aging

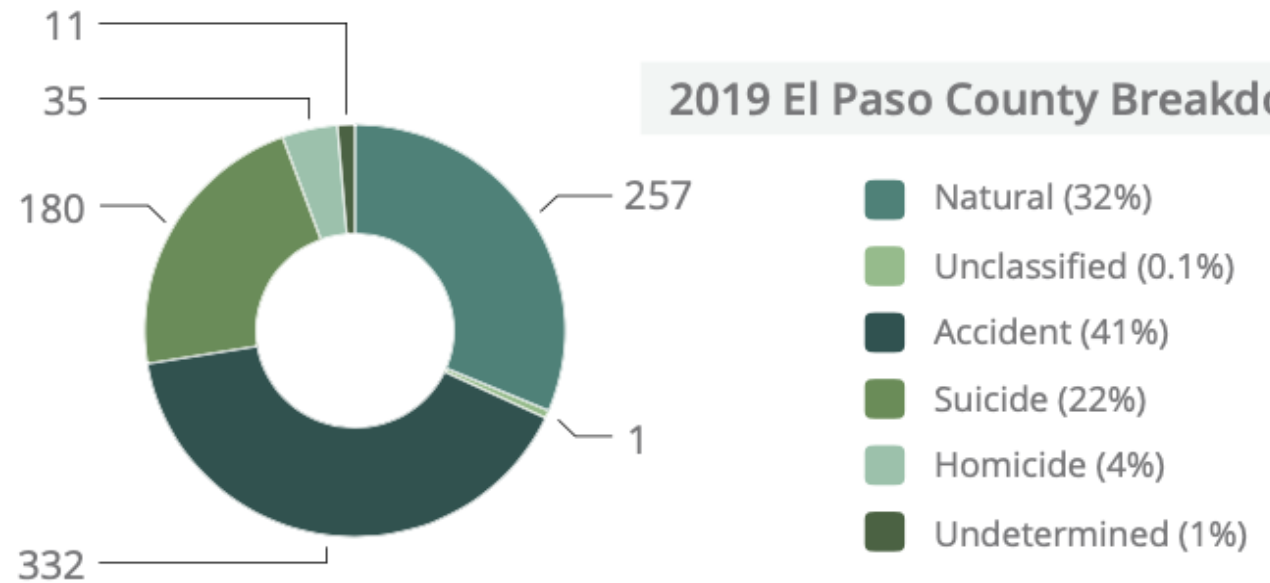
Accident - Deaths due to unintentional injury

Suicide - Deaths due to an intentional self-inflicted injury

Homicide - Deaths due to the intentional injurious action of another individual

Undetermined - Deaths in this category may or may not have a determined cause of death, or may have several different possible manners.

Unclassified - Death of a fetus in utero (in the uterus) does not receive a manner determination



Deaths Due to Natural Causes



257 Total

Cardiovascular	57%	146
Chronic Alcohol	10%	26
Infections	7%	18
Pulmonary Embolism	4%	11
Geriatric Decline/Dementia	4%	9
Pulmonary Disease	3%	7
Diabetes	3%	7
Gastrointestinal	3%	7
Cerebrovascular	2%	5
Complications of Pregnancy/Birth	2%	4
Morbid Obesity	2%	4
Epilepsy	2%	4
Cancer/Neoplasm	1%	3
Liver Disease	1%	2














Deaths Due to Accidents

Deaths Due to Accidents

We continue to see decreases in accidents (369 in 2018) largely due to decreases in fall related deaths (100 in 2018) and pedestrian deaths (19 in 2018). We did see a marked increase in hypothermia deaths (2 in 2018).

332 Total



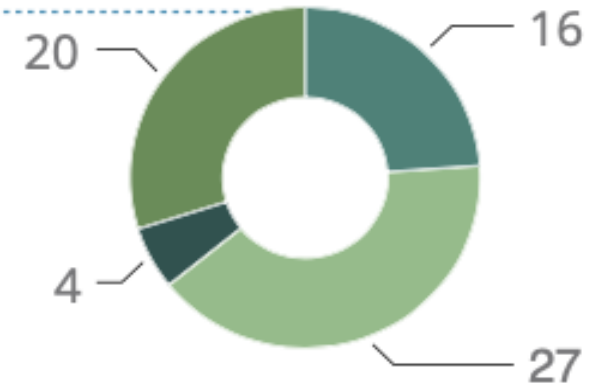
Drugs		39%	130
Falls		26%	85
Motor Vehicle Accidents		19%	64
Drowning		3%	10
Asphyxias		3%	10
Pedestrian Injury		2%	8
Hypothermia		2%	8
Carbon Monoxide		1%	4
Fires/Burns		<1%	3
ATV		<1%	3
Bicycle Injuries		<1%	3
Firearms		<1%	1
Others		<1%	3

Motor Vehicle Crash Deaths

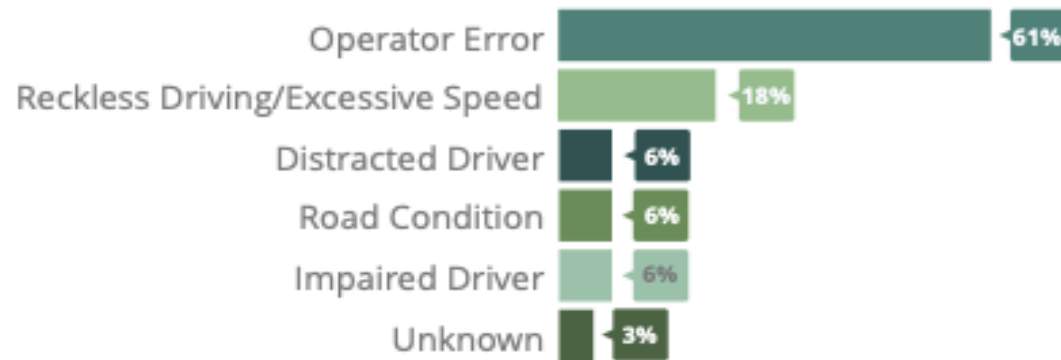
Use of Restraint/seatbelt



Every crash in which the decedent was ejected there was failure to use a seatbelt



Suspected Primary Cause of Crash



Of the **45** fatal accidents where the decedent was the "at fault driver" **24** had drugs, alcohol, or THC in their system at autopsy

Drugs: 4	Alcohol + THC: 2
Alcohol: 7	Drugs + Alcohol: 3
THC: 5	Drugs, Alcohol + THC: 3

Vehicle vs. Pedestrian

Pedestrian at fault

75%

Driver at fault

25%

Drug Related Accidental Deaths

The total number of drug-related deaths remained relatively steady from 2018 (133) due to decreases in heroin deaths (47 in 2018) being offset by an increase in fentanyl related deaths (9 in 2018). Overall methamphetamine continues to be the drug most commonly present at death (66 cases). Forty-five percent of deaths were due to a combination of two or more drugs.

130 Total

Opioids resulting in death

71 Total

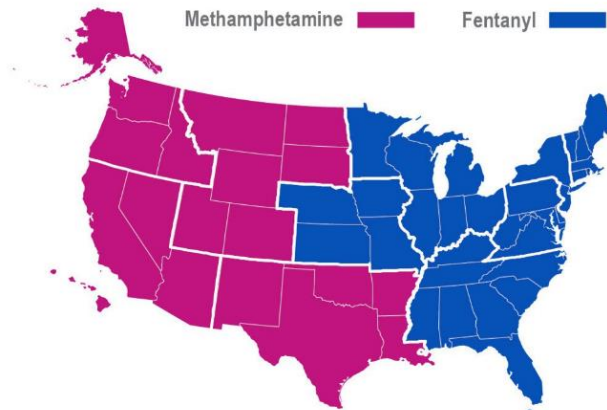
Heroin	35	Methadone	3
Oxycodone	7	Mixed RX Opioids	1
Hydrocodone	1	Buprenorphine	2
Fentanyl	21	Oxymorphone	1

 **20%**

Deaths of all causes that have marijuana metabolites present at autopsy
Represents a 1% decrease from 2018

Drug overdose deaths by region

Methamphetamine was the top drug involved in overdose deaths in most of the western half of the U.S. while fentanyl pervaded the eastern half.



NOTE: Data from 2017. Deaths may include additional drugs.
SOURCE: NCHS National Vital Statistics System

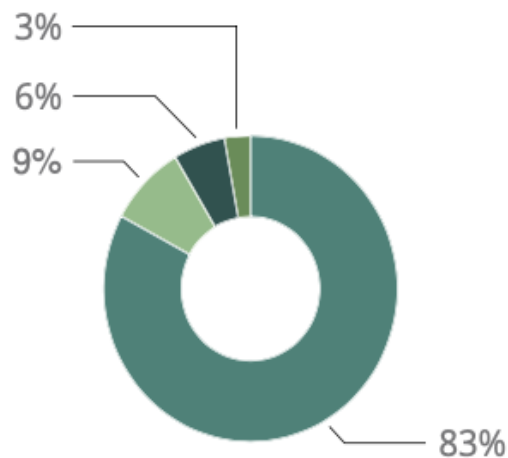
Methamphetamine	38
Heroin	11
Heroin + Methamphetamine	17
Prescription Opioids (+/- Ethanol or other meds)	14
Fentanyl + Other Prescription Drugs	4
Cocaine	5
Non-Opioid Prescription Drugs	7
Fentanyl	8
Heroin, Cocaine + Methamphetamine	2
Methamphetamine + Fentanyl	2
Cocaine + Heroin	2
Ethanol	5
Cocaine + Methamphetamine	4
Methamphetamine + Fentanyl + Heroin + Cocaine	2
Methamphetamine + Heroin + Fentanyl	1
Cocaine + Prescription Opioids	1
Fentanyl + Cocaine	4
Mitragynine	2
Freon Gas	1

Deaths Due to Homicide

2019 marked a sharp decrease in homicides (56 in 2018) of nearly all types.

35 Total

Firearms	29
Blunt Force Injuries	3
Sharp Force Injuries	2
Strangulation	1



83% of homicide victims were intoxicated with drugs (49% of victims), alcohol (40% of victims), THC (49% of victims) or some combination at death.

Apparent Circumstances of the Homicides



Altercation	14
Drug related	4
Domestic Violence	7
Officer Involved*	6
Gang Related	2
Reckless use of firearm	1
Military Combat Injuries	1

*All 6 officer-involved deaths resulted from a use of force (firearms) that resulted in the death of another. Therefore, the manner is ruled a homicide. However, this determination is not an opinion on the legality of the force used as this judgement is within the purview of the District Attorney and the justice system.

40% of decedents personally knew the suspect in their death.

Deaths by Homicide

Deaths Due to Suicides

Deaths Due to Suicide

There was an increase in suicides (152 in 2018) largely by firearms (80 in 2018) in our adult population.

180 Total

Firearms	102
Ligature	46
Drugs	19
Carbon Monoxide	2
Asphyxia	4
Fall	1
Sharp Force Injury	2

Drugs Used in Suicide

Opioids	11
Mixed alcohol and non-opioids	3
Other	5



40

Average age at death
(Range of 13 - 89 years)



33%

Notes or social media posts indicating suicidal intentions



64%

Have a reported history of prior suicidal thoughts



68%

Autopsies contain drugs (41%), alcohol (31%), or THC (14%) at the time of death



19%

Have known active or prior military duty

79%

of completed suicides were male



Most common risk factors: **recently ended relationship, personal health crisis, financial struggles, legal issues, and grief over the death of a loved one.**

Child Fatalities

El Paso County Coroner's Office investigated the deaths of 36 children (below the age of 18 years old). These cases are individually reviewed by the El Paso County Child Fatality Review Team to identify strategies to prevent these types of deaths in the future, which has resulted in community-wide efforts to decrease teen suicide and sudden infant death in El Paso County. There was an increase in motor vehicle deaths (3 in 2018), including 2 ATVs.

36 Total

Child Fatalities

Age	
<1 month	2
1 month - 1 year	12
1-4 Years	2
5-12 Years	1
13-17	19


Breakdown

Natural	3
Homicides	2
Suicides	9
Infant unsafe sleep/asphyxia	9
Undetermined	2
Drowning	1
Motor vehicle accident	6
Water Intoxication	1
Drugs, Accident	2
Complication of birth	1

Teen Suicides (Ages 13-15 Years)

Gender	Male: 6	Female: 3
Hanging	3	
Firearms	6	

When the Suicides Occurred

	January	April	August
	2	3	1
	September	November	December
	1	1	1

Infant Asphyxias: 9 Total

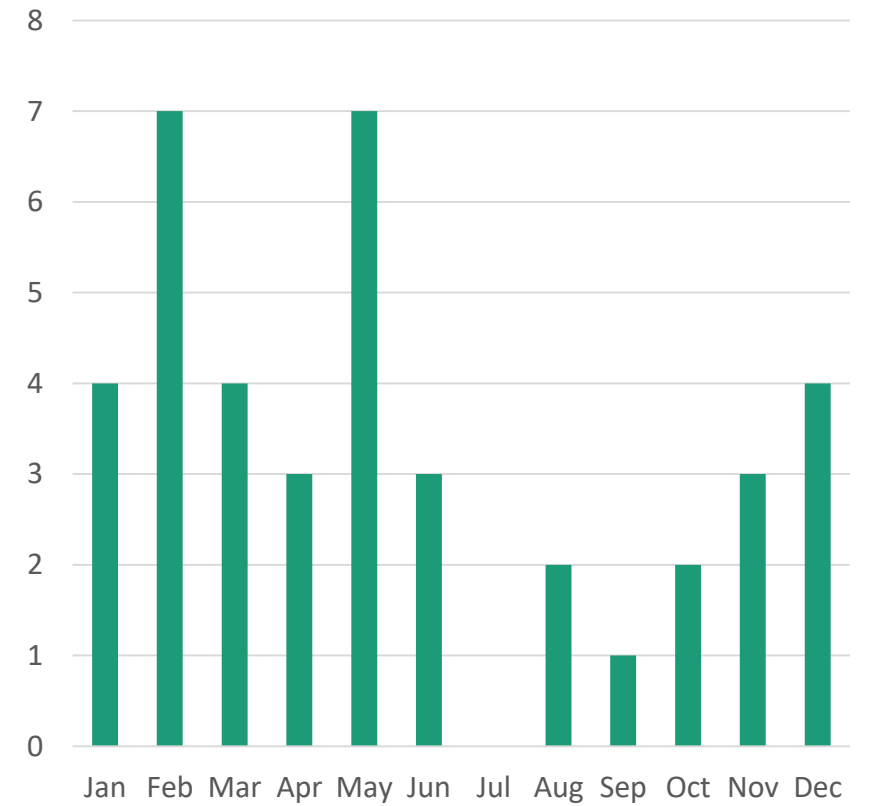
Deaths due to an unsafe sleep surface	6
Deaths due to bed sharing with adults	3



El Paso County Teen Suicide Epidemic

- Beginning in February of 2015 - April of 2017
 - 27-month period
 - 40 Teens completed suicide
 - 2015: 14
 - 2016: 15
 - 2017: 13 (14th 18 y/o student)
 - Highest concentration
 - 11 over 3.5 months, 2017
- Comparison Year 2014: 7
- A Community in Crisis
 - Local and national media
 - Parents, schools, community leaders

Deaths by Month



Death in the Homeless

Homelessness is defined as:

- Sleeping on the streets
- Sleeping in a tent, vehicle, or shelter
- "Couch surfing" or "squatting"
- Transitional living program
- Temporary residence in a motel

45

Average age at death

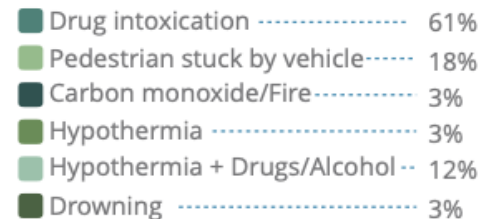
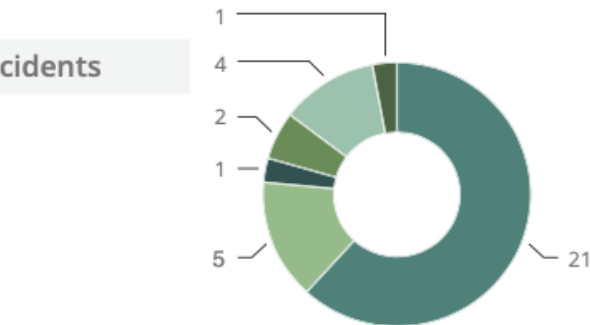
RACE

White - 88%
Black - 3%
Hispanic - 9%

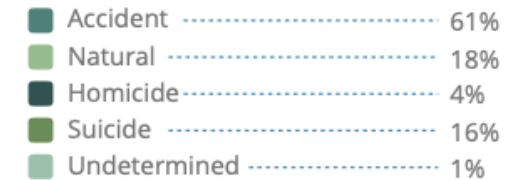
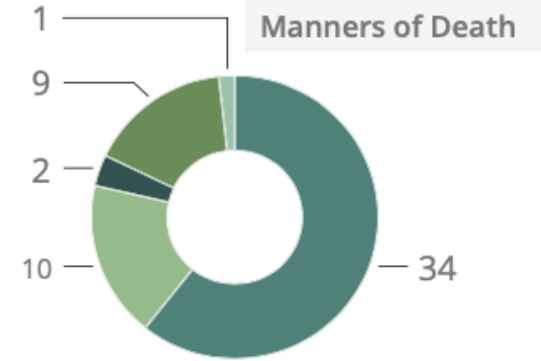
86%

Homeless deaths were male

Accidents



Manners of Death



Natural Deaths

Heart Disease	5
Alcoholism	3
Infections	1
Global Decline	1

Drug Intoxications

Methamphetamine	10
Heroin	1
Methamphetamine + Heroin	7
Methamphetamine + Fentanyl	1
Methamphetamine + Cocaine	1
Methamp. + Cocaine + Heroin	1
Mixed Drugs and/or Alcohol	3
Other	1

Firearms Related Deaths

Firearms Related Deaths

In 2019, 132 total individuals died of firearms related injuries. There was a marked decrease in firearm associated homicides (41 in 2018) which was offset by a marked increase in firearm related suicides (80 in 2018).

132 Total



Firearm Related Homicide Circumstances

Altercation	11
Drug related	5
Domestic violence	4
Gang	2
Reckless use of a firearm	1
Lawful use of deadly force by law enforcement	6

24

El Paso County donors had organs recovered for transplantation

68

El Paso County tissue donor cases fell under the coroner's jurisdiction

17 of the 24

71%

Were coroner jurisdiction cases and all were approved for donation



Organs were transplanted from El Paso County donors



Cases resulted in tissue harvest

There were no refusals of organ or tissue requests by the El Paso County Coroner

Organ and tissue donation