Kentucky Substance Use Research & Enforcement

Using data to drive public safety and public health efforts against substance use across the Commonwealth

Brief: Five Major Overdose Related Substances in Kentucky, January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2018

Possession and Trafficking Citations, Drug Overdose Related Deaths, Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, and Submissions to State Police Lab
Produced by the Kentucky State Policy Intelligence Branch; and, the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center (KIPRC), as bona fide agent for the Kentucky Department for Public Health.

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Suggested Citation:

Key Findings:

- Heroin possession and trafficking citations have decreased from January 2017 to December 2018 by 12.3% and 9.1% respectively.
- Heroin related deaths decreased by 69.3% among Kentucky residents from January 2017 to December 2018.
- Statewide decrease of 34.7% of heroin related tested lab submissions.
- Total heroin related events in regards to heroin possession and trafficking citations, related deaths, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and tested lab submissions have decreased overall by 40.3% from January 2017 through December 2018. Nevertheless, heroin remains a public safety and public health concern in the state.
Notes: Data are provisional and subject to change. Possession Citations are comprised of KRS: 35220; 35221; 42197; 42198; 42209; 42210; 42237; 42238; and 42246. Trafficking Citations are comprised of KRS: 35200; 35201; 42109; 42110; 42372; 42373; 42374; 42375; 42435; 42436; 42437; and 42438. The number of citations could be greater than the number of individuals cited; citations are with over 90 percent law enforcement agencies reporting. Deaths are based on drug overdose related deaths among Kentucky residents. Opioid related emergency department visits and hospitalizations do not include heroin. Drug overdose related hospitalizations represent encounters of care among Kentucky residents and could be greater than the number of individual patients treated in acute care facilities. Drug overdose related emergency department visits represent encounters of care among Kentucky residents and could be greater than the number of individual patients treated. To avoid duplicate counts, emergency department visits excluded visits resulting in hospitalizations. Tested Lab Submission data represents those substances submitted to the lab for identification purposes; quantity is not reflected. Lab Data represents submissions tested within the corresponding timeframe; submission date is not reflected. Tested Lab Submission Opioid data represents Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, Buprenorphine and Codeine numbers only.

Data sources: Kentucky Open Portal System; Kentucky Death Certificate Database, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Office of Vital Statistics; Kentucky Outpatient Claim Files, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Office of Health and Data Analytics; Kentucky Inpatient Hospitalization Claims Files, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Kentucky Office of Health and Data Analytics; Kentucky State Police Crime Laboratory.

Key Findings:

- Statewide opioid possession citations decreased by 15.9% from January 2017 through December 2018, meanwhile related trafficking citations substantially decreased by 42.2%.
- Opioid related emergency department visits decreased by 30.4%, hospitalizations decreased by 29.2%, and opioid related deaths decreased by 33.9% among Kentucky residents from January 1, 2017 to the December 31, 2018. Opioids remain the leading substances identified among fatal drug overdoses (data not shown).
- Despite the 36.8% decrease in tested lab submissions positively identifying opioids, no significant changes were observed in the percentage of opioids identified among all tested lab submissions from 2017 through 2018. Opioids accounted for nearly a tenth of the total tested lab submissions to KSP Laboratories (data not shown).
- Opioids and their adverse effects continue to plague the Commonwealth, despite the number of opioid related events decreasing by an average of 31.4% from 2017 through 2018.
Key Findings:

- Statewide methamphetamine possession citations increased by 34.9% and trafficking citations by 21.2% from January 2017 through December 2018.
- Methamphetamine related overdose deaths have increased 2.8% when looking at the beginning of 2017 through the end of 2018. All methamphetamine related overdose deaths involved polysubstance use.
- Methamphetamine continues to be the most commonly submitted drug to KSP Laboratories accounting for 43% of tested lab submissions in the 2018 (data not shown).
- Methamphetamine related events increased by an average of 32.6% from January 2017 through December 2018. Methamphetamine is a high-level threat to the Commonwealth’s safety and health.
Notes: Data are provisional and subject to change. Possession Citations are comprised of KRS: 35320; 35321; 42193; 42194; 42203; and 42204. Trafficking Citations are comprised of KRS: 35300; 35301; 42103; 42104; 42368; 42369; and 42370. The number of citations could be greater than the number of individuals cited; citations are with over 90 percent law enforcement agencies reporting. Deaths are based on drug overdose related deaths among Kentucky residents. Drug overdose related hospitalizations represent encounters of care among Kentucky residents and could be greater than the number of individual patients treated in acute care facilities. Drug overdose related emergency department visits represent encounters of care among Kentucky residents and could be greater than the number of individual patients treated. To avoid duplicate counts, emergency department visits excluded visits resulting in hospitalizations. Tested Lab Submission data represents those substances submitted to the lab for identification purposes; quantity is not reflected. Lab Data represents submissions tested within the corresponding timeframe; submission date is not reflected.

Data sources: Kentucky Open Portal System; Kentucky Death Certificate Database, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Office of Vital Statistics; Kentucky Outpatient Claim Files, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Office of Health and Data Analytics; Kentucky Inpatient Hospitalization Claims Files, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Kentucky Office of Health and Data Analytics; Kentucky State Police Crime Laboratory.

Key Findings:

- Statewide cocaine possession citations increased by 2.4% from January 2017 through December 2018, while trafficking citations decreased by 19.5% during this same timeframe.
- There was a stark decrease in the number of cocaine related deaths and hospitalizations from 2017 through 2018; both decreased by over half (52.9% and 53.5%, respectively).
- Cocaine related emergency department visits declined by 9.7% from 2017 through 2018.
- Tested lab submissions positively identifying cocaine decreased by 16.6% from 2017 through 2018. Cocaine accounted for 10% of the total tested lab submissions to KSP Laboratories, a percentage that did not significantly change from 2017 through 2018 (data not shown).
- Cocaine use, misuse, and distribution have remained prevalent in Kentucky from 2017 through 2018.
Key Findings:

- Statewide fentanyl and fentanyl analog trafficking citations increased 87.0% from January 2017 through December 2018.
- Fentanyl and fentanyl analog related deaths decreased by 28.9% from the beginning of 2017 to the end of 2018.
- Tested lab submissions positively identifying fentanyl and fentanyl analogs increased by 57.9% from January 2017 through December 2018. KSP Laboratories continue to see several different fentanyl derivatives in casework along with poly-drug mixtures, including heroin/fentanyl mixtures, as well as cocaine/fentanyl mixtures and methamphetamine/fentanyl mixtures. Most recently, fentanyl mixed only with other fentanyl analogs was prevalent in tested lab submissions in 2018 (data not shown).
- Fentanyl and fentanyl analogs have become increasingly pervasive throughout Kentucky, emerging in our streets and communities—increasing risks of overdose, and exposures to law enforcement.