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 – March 31, 2019

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

This report is supported by: The Grant Number 5 NU17CE924971-01-00 funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; COPS Anti Heroin Task Force - 2017HPWX0001, COPS Anti Methamphetamine Program - 2017AMWX0003 funded by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). Report contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the funders.

Suggested Citation:

Heroin Related Events

Data are provisional and subject to change. Possession Citations are comprised of KRS: 35120; 35121; 42195; 42196; 42205; and 42206. Trafficking Citations are comprised of KRS: 35100; 35101; 42105; 42106; 42376; 42377; 42378; 42379; 42466; 42468; 42470; 42480; 42483; and 42486. 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:

- Heroin possession and trafficking citations decreased by 15.8% and 12.2%, respectively, from January 2017 through March 2019.
- Kentucky resident heroin related deaths decreased by over half (54.5%) from January 2017 through March 2019.
- Heroin related tested lab submissions decreased 36.1%.
- Heroin remains a public safety and public health concern, despite the 42.3% decrease in total heroin related events (possession and trafficking citations, related deaths, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and tested lab submissions) from the first quarters of 2017-2019.
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 14.4% from January 2017 through March 2019, meanwhile related trafficking citations substantially decreased by 30.1%.
- Opioid related emergency department visits decreased by 22.4%, hospitalizations decreased by 33.7%, and opioid related deaths decreased by 27.6% among Kentucky residents from January 1, 2017 to the March 31, 2019. Opioids remain the leading substances identified among fatal drug overdoses (data not shown).
- Despite the 8.0% 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 the end of the first quarter of 2019. Opioids accounted for nearly a tenth of the total tested lab submissions to KSP Laboratories from the first quarter of 2017 through the first quarter of 2019 (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 19.7% from the first quarter of 2017 to the first quarter of 2019.
Key Findings:

- Statewide methamphetamine possession citations increased by 43.1% and trafficking citations by 26.1% from January 2017 through March 2019.
- Methamphetamine related overdose deaths have increased 11.1% from quarters 1 of 2017 to 2019. All methamphetamine related overdose deaths involved polysubstance use.
- Methamphetamine continues to be the most commonly submitted drug to KSP Laboratories accounting for 42% of tested lab submissions from the beginning of 2017 through the end of March 2019 (data not shown).
- Methamphetamine related events, high-level threat to the Commonwealth’s safety and health, increased by an average of 42.1% from January 2017 through March 2019.
Key Findings:

- Statewide cocaine possession citations increased by 4.1% from January 2017 through March 2019, while trafficking citations decreased by 22.2% during this same timeframe.
- Both cocaine related deaths and hospitalizations decreased by over half (58.8% and 54.9%, respectively) from the first quarters of 2017 and 2019.
- Cocaine related emergency department visits declined by 22.6% from the first quarter of 2017 to the first quarter of 2019.
- Tested lab submissions positively identifying cocaine decreased by 14.4% from 2017 quarter 1 to 2019 quarter 1. Cocaine accounted for 9% of the total tested lab submissions to KSP Laboratories from the beginning of 2017 through the end of the first quarter of 2019 (data not shown).
- Cocaine use, misuse, and distribution remains prevalent in Kentucky as of the first quarter of 2019.
Data are provisional and subject to change. Trafficking Citations are comprised of KRS: 42465; 42472; 42474; 42476; 42478; 42590; 42593; 42596; and 42599. The number of citations could be greater than the number of individuals cited; citations are with over 90 percent law enforcement agencies reporting. There are no KRS codes for Fentanyl possession. 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 fentanyl and fentanyl analog trafficking citations increased 73.9% from January 2017 through March 2019.** Citations related to fentanyl and its related analogs may be underestimated for various reasons. Fentanyl and fentanyl related analogs are often present in combination with other drug mixtures, however, laboratory testing is often needed to confirm the presence of this substance.

- **Fentanyl and fentanyl analog related deaths decreased by 17.9% from the beginning of 2017 to the end of March 2019.**

- **Tested lab submissions positively identifying fentanyl and fentanyl analogs increased by 58.1% from January 2017 through March 2019.** Fentanyl mixed only with other fentanyl analogs was prevalent in tested lab submissions from the beginning of 2018 through the first quarter of 2019 (data not shown). KSP Laboratories continue to see several different fentanyl derivatives in casework along with poly-drug mixtures, including heroin/fentanyl, cocaine/fentanyl, and methamphetamine/fentanyl.

- **Fentanyl and fentanyl analogs are increasingly pervasive in Kentucky communities—increasing risks of overdose, and exposures to law enforcement.**