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 – June 30, 2019

Possession and Trafficking Citations, Drug Overdose Related Deaths, Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, Submissions to State Police Lab, and General Drug Overdose Related Events
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.

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_Suggested Citation:_

Key Findings:

- Heroin possession and trafficking citations decreased by 15.5% and 9.1%, respectively, from January 2017 through June 2019.
- Kentucky resident heroin related deaths decreased by over half (55.7%) from January 2017 through June 2019.
- Heroin related tested lab submissions decreased 42.0% from the beginning of 2017 through the end of the second quarter of 2019.
- Heroin remains a public safety and public health concern, despite the 39.3% decrease in total heroin related events (possession and trafficking citations, related deaths, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and tested lab submissions) from the first quarter of 2017 through the second quarter of 2019.
Key Findings:

- Statewide opioid possession and trafficking citations decreased by 37.0% and 33.7%, respectively, from January 2017 through June 2019.
- Opioid related emergency department visits decreased by 18.9%, and hospitalizations decreased by 33.7% from January 2017 through June 2019.
- Opioid related deaths decreased by 29.1% among Kentucky residents from January 1, 2017 to June 30, 2019. Opioids remain the leading substances identified among fatal drug overdoses (data not shown).
- Despite the 15.0% 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 second 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 second quarter of 2019 (data not shown).
- Despite the number of opioid related events decreasing by an average of 23.8% from the first quarter of 2017 to the second quarter of 2019, opioids and their adverse effects remain prevalent throughout Commonwealth.

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.
Data are provisional and subject to change. Possession Citations are comprised of KRS: 42187; 42188; 42215; and 42216. Trafficking Citations are comprised of KRS: 42113; 42114; 42290; 42291; 42364; 42365; 42366; and 42367. 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 methamphetamine possession citations increased by 43.5% and trafficking citations by 15.0% from January 2017 through June 2019.
- Methamphetamine related overdose deaths have increased 25.0% from 2017 quarter 1 to 2019 quarter 2. All methamphetamine related overdose deaths involved polysubstance use.
- Methamphetamine continues to be the most commonly submitted drug to KSP Laboratories accounting for 43.4% of tested lab submissions from the beginning of 2017 through June 2019 (data not shown).
- Methamphetamine use and distribution are a persistent threat to the Commonwealth’s safety and health, as methamphetamine-related events increased by an average of 46.7% from January 2017 through June 2019.
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 trafficking citations decreased by 26.8% from January 2017 through June 2019, while possession citations decreased by 11.8% during this same timeframe.
- Cocaine related deaths decreased by 35.3%, while hospitalizations decreased by over half (60.6%) from the first quarter of 2017 to the second quarter of 2019.
- Cocaine related emergency department visits declined by 25.8% from the 2017 quarter 1 through 2019 quarter 2.
- Tested lab submissions positively identifying cocaine decreased by 19.1% from 2017 quarter 1 to 2019 quarter 2. Cocaine accounted for 8.8% of the total tested lab submissions to KSP Laboratories from the beginning of 2017 through the end of the second quarter of 2019 (data not shown).
- Cocaine use, misuse, and distribution still affects Kentuckians.
Key Findings:

- Statewide fentanyl and fentanyl analog trafficking citations increased 82.6% from January 2017 through June 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 15.9% from the beginning of 2017 to the end of June 2019.

- Tested lab submissions positively identifying fentanyl and fentanyl analogs increased by 87.1% from January 2017 through June 2019. Fentanyl mixed only with other fentanyl analogs was prevalent in tested lab submissions from the beginning of 2018 through the second 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 individuals, families, and law enforcement.
**Key Findings:**

- **Statewide drug overdose related deaths decreased by 32.1% from the beginning of 2017 through the second quarter of 2019.**
- **Overall, emergency department visits related to drug overdose have decreased by 30.7% from 2017 through June 2019.**
- **Hospitalizations followed a downward trend, decreasing by 25.9% from 2017 through June 2019.**
- **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) suspected drug overdose encounters decreased by 10.3% from January 2017 through the end of June 2019.**
- **Reductions have been seen across the Commonwealth in regards to drug related public health and public safety events; however, drug use, misuse, and distribution are issues that still remain—impacting the lives of all Kentuckians.**