



**OFFICE OF THE CORONER
COUNTY OF CHESTER**
Coroner: Christina VandePol, M.D.

“Committed Service and
Responsiveness”

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Photo Caption: Chester County Coroner Dr. Christina VandePol

Photo Credit: Elizabeth Reuscher

The Chester County Coroner’s Office has released information on 2019 accidental deaths in Chester County. A total of 225 accidental deaths were investigated, slightly fewer than in 2018 (232) and 2017 (234). Drug overdoses, falls, and motor vehicle collisions accounted for most of the accidental deaths.

Drug overdose remained the most common cause of accidental death in the County, comprising 46% of such deaths. A total of 104 accidental drug overdoses were reported, a 7% decrease compared to 2018. This continues a downward trend from the peak of 144 overdose deaths in 2017. White men in the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups continued to be the predominant demographic group dying of a drug overdose. Fentanyl, present in more than 2/3 of cases, remained by far the most frequently identified substance on toxicology testing. The majority of drug overdose deaths involved multiple substances. Heroin, cocaine, and ethanol were each present in approximately 25% of cases. Xylazine, a large animal anesthetic often used to adulterate illicit drugs in this County, was present in approximately 23% of cases.

Coroner Christina VandePol, M.D., stated “The intense efforts to combat the opioid epidemic appear to be having an impact, at least as far as fatal overdoses. Hopefully, we have turned a corner, but it’s still a tragedy when more than 100 people in our County die of a preventable cause. Many of these deaths are now occurring in people who have sought and received treatment or who have been incarcerated, so in my opinion we need to take a closer look at those situations to see how we can do better.”

Falls continued to be the second most common cause of accidental death, but unlike drug overdose deaths, deaths attributed to falls are on the rise. In 2017, 45 people died after a fall but this increased to 76 in 2019. The percentage of accidental deaths from falls rose from 19% in 2017 to 27% in 2018 and then 34% in 2019.

“The increased incidence of falls as a preventable cause of death is alarming,” said VandePol. “It reflects the aging of our population, as almost 80% of fall-related deaths are in those over the age of 80. The actual incidence is probably higher, because we are not always notified when an elderly person dies after a fall. Analysis of fall-related and other preventable deaths in our older residents has been and will continue to be a focus of the Coroner’s Office.”

The Chester County Coroner’s Office posts statistics on its website at <https://www.chesco.org/209/Coroner>.

The Chester County Coroner's Office is an independent agency serving the citizens and honoring the deceased of the county by investigating the facts and circumstances concerning jurisdictional deaths which have occurred within Chester County. We determine the cause and manner of death, the identity of the decedent, and provide notification to the legal next of kin, while exhibiting the highest degree of compassion, professionalism, and integrity.