

TARRANT COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER DISTRICT



Serving Tarrant, Denton, Johnson & Parker Counties

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Accredited by:



Accreditation Council for
Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)



ANSI National Accreditation Board
(ANAB)



National Association of Medical
Examiners (NAME)

Tarrant County Medical Examiner and Forensic Science Laboratories

200 Feliks Gwozdz Pl., Fort Worth, TX 76104-4919
Tel.: (817) 920-5700 | Fax: (817) 920-5713

<http://access.tarrantcounty.com/en/medical-examiner.html>

Our Mission

Whenever we are called upon to assist, even if it is outside our defined jurisdiction, beyond the scope of our duties, or otherwise removed from our responsibilities under the law, it is our general policy to help people reach the appropriate person or agency who can assist them. This is not only our philosophy, but our commitment to those we serve.

The primary purpose of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office is to assist the public and law enforcement in determining the cause and manner of death whenever death occurs without medical attention, from unnatural causes, or in the wake of violence. We are proud and grateful to be able to carry out our mission using state of the art laboratory and forensic science facilities.



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About Us

Originally established in 1965, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office today serves four counties—Denton, Johnson, Parker, and Tarrant—with a total district population exceeding 2.8 million. As the district continues to grow, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office remains committed as ever to providing the highest quality of service to the loved ones of each decedent and to the legal system.

As the district's population has boomed, so too have advances in the field of forensic science and its companion subjects of anatomy, physiology, chemistry, and biology. The staff at the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office understand the need to keep up with these exciting developments and they routinely apply their knowledge in these areas to the science of determining the cause of death.

In this endeavor, the staff of seven highly trained, board certified forensic pathologists are aided both by an investigative team staffed round-the-clock and a full complement of support services, including human identification, toxicology, criminalistics, and forensic anthropology.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Medical Examiner case?

[Article 49.25 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, State of Texas](#) clearly defines which cases fall under the jurisdiction of medical examiners. Medical examiner cases include sudden, unexpected, violent, unnatural, unattended and other deaths “affecting the public interest.”

What are your business hours?

The Tarrant County Medical Examiner District Office serves the public from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding County and Federal holidays. Our contact information is:

Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office
200 Feliks Gwozdz Pl., Fort Worth, TX 76104-4919
(817) 920-5700

<http://access.tarrantcounty.com/en/medical-examiner.html>

The District includes three other counties with satellite offices:

Denton County

535 South Loop 288, Suite 1132, Denton, TX 76205-4502
(940) 349-2870; (972) 434-8833

<http://dentoncounty.com/Departments/Health-Services/Health-Department/Medical-Examiner.aspx>

Johnson County

103 S Walnut Street, Cleburne, Texas 76033
(817) 558-2245

<http://www.johnsoncountytexas.org/departments/medical-examiner>

Parker County

129 Hogle Street, Weatherford, Texas 76086
(817) 594-3213; (800) 233-3732

<https://parkercountysheriff.net/contact-us/>

Do I make complaints to your office about a doctor I am having trouble with?

No. The Texas Medical Board is responsible for complaints regarding physicians. Please visit their website at <http://www.tmb.state.tx.us/page/place-a-complaint>. If you have a complaint about our staff please feel free to call us at (817) 920-5700, extension 8330, to speak with our Administrative Director.

What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is a dignified surgical procedure that provides a systematic examination of the body of a deceased person by a qualified physician. All the physicians performing autopsies at Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District are certified by the American Board of Pathology in anatomic pathology and forensic pathology. During the procedure, a body is inspected for the presence of disease or injury, and minimal specimens of the vital organs and/or body fluids may be taken for further analysis. The internal organs and the brain are examined, then replaced in the body for burial.

Does the law require the medical examiner to perform an autopsy on every reported death?

No. The law only stipulates that the medical examiner shall perform an "inquest", or inquiry into death. It is left up to the discretion and learned judgment of the medical examiner to perform an autopsy in cases affecting the public interest. In only about one-fifth of the cases investigated by the medical examiner is an autopsy deemed necessary. In some cases, the medical examiner may perform a limited or partial autopsy; this is allowed by the statute.

Does the family pay for any medical examiner services?

No. These are statutory examinations and families pay nothing for the medical examiner services or for the transportation of remains to the Central Morgue for examination. Families may be billed by the funeral home for transportation to the funeral home they select after completion of the examination.

How long does an autopsy take?

A standard forensic autopsy will take two to three hours. Complicated medical cases or cases of traumatic deaths with multiple injuries can take longer in order to fully document all observations.

What if objections to an autopsy are raised?

When family members object to an autopsy based on religious beliefs, cultural traditions, or other deeply-held convictions, every effort to honor the objection will be made. However, if the public responsibility cannot be fulfilled without performing an autopsy, or at least a limited autopsy, the family will be provided an opportunity to be represented by legal counsel and to have their objection presented to a judge before the autopsy is performed, whenever possible.

Are tests for drugs and alcohol performed?

In all cases investigated by the medical examiner, including those in which autopsies are not conducted, fluids may be taken for toxicological tests and DNA profile. The results of these tests are often important factors in being able to determine the cause and manner of death. Not all cases will receive toxicological testing, especially if such testing will not influence the cause or manner of death.

Can a medical examiner case still be an organ or tissue donor?

Yes. Once family members have expressed interest, the medical examiner will review the request with the organ bank. Organs are generally harvested from a heart-beating donor only in a hospital setting. Tissues, including skin, bones, and corneas may be harvested at the medical examiner's office. In the vast majority of cases, the medical examiner will impose no restrictions on organs and tissues harvested with the written consent of next of kin.

What if no one claims the body on a Medical Examiner's case?

The law provides for burial or cremation when no relative claims the body. These matters are handled through the county's social services department:

Tarrant County Human Services

1200 Circle Dr., Suite 200, Fort Worth, TX 76119

Open Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

(817) 531-5620

<http://access.tarrantcounty.com/en/human-services.html>

When is the body released?

A body is released to a mortuary or crematory once the examination is complete and the family has designated an arrangement for burial or cremation. Family members may contact the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office at **(817) 920-5700** to inform us of their selection of a funeral home. The family must then instruct the funeral home to call us for release of the body.

Bodies brought to the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office are generally ready for release to a funeral home within 24 hours. Only in rare cases are bodies held for legal purposes. Upon request, the release of remains may be expedited in order to honor the religious, cultural, or other beliefs of the family.

Can we view the body?

No. Our office does not have facilities for the viewing of bodies. Please contact the funeral home if you wish to view the body.

Do I have to identify my loved one's body?

If identification is required, the family will be contacted by a representative of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office. If your loved one is missing and you have reason to suspect that their body may be among our cases, please contact us at **(817) 920-5700**.

What happens to clothing and personal items?

Unless it is identified as evidence, all clothing and personal items held by the medical examiner are released with the body to the funeral home or crematory. Any item identified as evidence is either retained for further testing and examination or turned over to the investigating law enforcement agency. For questions concerning these items, please contact the office at **(817) 920-5700**.

Does the Medical Examiner's Office ever keep parts of the body?

In all cases in which an autopsy is performed, the medical examiner will biopsy and retain a small piece of tissue in order to study the organ histologically. Occasionally, a whole organ (such as the brain or the eyes) may be retained for neuropathological examination. If the next of kin desires to have these tissues returned to the funeral home after such testing is complete, please contact us **(817) 920-5700** to make this request.

What kinds of reports are produced?

The Tarrant County Medical Examiner produces at least two, and generally three, reports for each case:

1. The physician's examination report
2. The report of death investigation
3. The toxicology report (if toxicological testing was performed)

Depending on the complexity of the case there may be other reports, including bacterial/viral culture, special chemistry, heavy metal and other poisons, anthropology, human identification, criminalistics, etc.

Are my loved one's reports and test results protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)?

No. Records generated by the Medical Examiner in the performance of his duties are subject to the [Texas Public Information Act](#), which requires that citizens have access to information on governmental action. This transparency provides Texans with a better understanding of how their government works and, when necessary, enables them to hold their public officials accountable.

Specifically, [Section §552.021 of the act](#) allows public access to information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance, or in connection with the transaction of official business. Under this statute, all written records generated by the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office are public records and may be released upon request to any citizen. Note that death scene photographs and postmortem examination photographs are *not* subject to release under this statute.

How soon can I have the death certificate?

Effective 2007, the Texas Health and Safety Code, Section §193.005 requires medical certifiers on a death certificate to submit the medical certification and attest to its validity using an electronic process approved by the State Registrar. Additionally, the Health and Safety Code Section §193.003 requires that the medical examiner complete this medical certification not later than five days after receiving the death record.

In the majority of medical examiner cases, the exact cause of death will be pending further testing or investigation. In these cases, the medical examiner files a “pending” death certificate. This pending death certificate is then amended once the case is complete and a cause and manner of death have been determined.

Once the death record has been filed by the funeral home, certified copies of the death certificate can be obtained from the funeral home or the County Clerk. County Clerk contact information for all counties participating in the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District is provided below:

Denton County

1450 E. McKinney St., Denton, TX 76202-2187
(940) 349-2018

<http://dentoncounty.com/Departments/County-Clerk.aspx>

Johnson County

P.O. Box 1986, Cleburne, Texas 76033
(817) 202-4000

<http://www.johnsoncountytexas.org/government/county-clerk>

Parker County

P.O. Box 819, Weatherford, Texas 76086
(817) 594-7461

<http://www.parkercountytexas.com/index.aspx?NID=105>

Tarrant County Vital Statistics

200 Taylor St., Rm. 301, Fort Worth, TX 76196-2000
(817) 884-1550

<http://access.tarrantcounty.com/en/county-clerk.html>

How long does it take to complete a report?

The [Texas Health and Safety Code, Section §671.012](#), requires that a designated physician who performs an autopsy provided for by state law shall file the autopsy report not later than the 30th day after the date of autopsy, provided that required testing can be completed within that time. Depending on the complexity of the case and the number of postmortem tests ordered, a report may take up to 12 weeks or more before being completed.

Will the next of kin automatically receive copies of the reports?

No. As we recognize that some families will not want to receive copies of the reports, it is necessary for the legal next of kin desiring this information to contact our office, request the report in writing, and confirm their mailing address. The reports will then be sent upon completion of the case. Only one copy of the report will be sent free of charge.

Families interested in obtaining a copy of the report should submit a written request to the Records Custodian. For fastest processing, requests should be emailed to TCMErecords@tarrantcounty.com. If submitting a records request by mail, please use the following address:

Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office

Attn: Records Custodian
200 Feliks Gwozdz Pl.
Fort Worth, TX 76104-4919

Who can get copies of the reports?

Documents are routinely provided to law enforcement, the district attorney, special government agencies, and the hospital providing treatment at the time of death. One copy of the examination report, investigative findings, and toxicology report will be provided at no cost to the immediate next of kin upon written request.

As discussed in the earlier question, “*Are my loved one’s reports and test results protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)?*,” [Section §552.021 of the Texas Public Information Act](#) also mandates that our records be made available to any citizen upon request.

Can I get copies of the photos of my deceased relative?

Yes. Scene photographs and/or postmortem examination photographs may be released upon presentation of a properly executed medical release or 'next of kin' letter, which must contain all of the following elements to be considered valid:

1. The requestor's full name, address, and contact information
2. A statement indicating the requestor is the nearest legal next of kin and providing his/her relationship to the decedent
3. The specific information the requestor is seeking (e.g., all autopsy and/or scene photographs)
4. The requestor's notarized signature affixed to the letter
5. A copy of the requestor's driver license

Non-family members can make a request for the scene and autopsy photographs upon presentation of a properly executed and notarized medical release from the legal next-of-kin. All requests received from either family or non-family members will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

What if the next of kin cannot afford the costs of the funeral?

An application for indigent cremation may be made with the **Tarrant County Human Services Department** (see page 9 for contact information). Proof of indigent status may be required. Tarrant County Human Services is only able to provide assistance to families whose loved one(s) have died within Tarrant County. A funeral home may assist the family with the application process for the county cremation program.

What is required for cremation?

The [Texas Health and Safety Code, Section §716.004](#) prohibits a crematory establishment from cremating human remains within 48 hours of the time of death indicated on the death certificate, unless the waiting period is waived in writing by (1) the medical examiner of the county in which the death occurred or (2) a court order. In compliance with this statute, the medical examiner has established a policy outlining the process of requesting a waiver under Subsection (a) during regular business hours and outside of regular business hours, including weekends and holidays.

In all other cases, after the mandatory waiting period the crematory is required to obtain a permit from the county medical examiner. If the death is not a medical examiner's case, the Medical Examiner requires the funeral home to provide a death certificate before the Medical Examiner can issue a cremation permit.

Accreditations

Accreditation Council for
Graduate Medical
Education

401 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60611

Phone 312.755.5000
Fax 312.755.7498
www.acgme.org

3/25/2021

Nizam Peerwani, MD
Director, Forensic Pathology Residency Program
Tarrant County Medical Examiner
200 Feliks Gwozdz Place
Fort Worth, TX 76104



Dear Dr. Peerwani,

The Review Committee for Pathology, functioning in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), has reviewed the information submitted regarding the following program:

Forensic pathology

Tarrant County Medical Examiner Program
Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office
Fort Worth, TX

Program 3104822087

Based on the information available to it at its recent meeting, the Review Committee accredited the program as follows:

Status: Continued Accreditation
Maximum Number of Residents: 1
Effective Date: 01/11/2021

The Review Committee commended the program for its demonstrated substantial compliance with the ACGME's Program Requirements and/or Institutional Requirements without any new citations.

The ACGME must be notified of any major changes in the organization of the program. When corresponding with the ACGME, please identify the program by name and number as indicated above. Changes in participating sites and changes in leadership must be reported to the Review Committee using the ACGME Accreditation Data System (ADS).

Sincerely,

Kate Hatlak, EdD
Executive Director
Review Committee for Pathology
312.755.7416
khatlak@acgme.org



CERTIFICATE OF ACCREDITATION

ANSI National Accreditation Board

2000 Regency Parkway, Suite 430, Cary, NC 27518

This is to certify that

**Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office
Forensic Laboratory Services**

has been assessed by ANAB
and meets the requirements of

ISO/IEC 17025:2005

**ANAB 17025:2005 Forensic Science Calibration Laboratories
Accreditation Requirements:2017**

while demonstrating technical competence in the field of

FORENSIC CALIBRATION

Refer to the accompanying Scope of Accreditation for information
regarding the types of calibrations to which this accreditation applies

Certificate Number: FC-0010

Valid to: 07/31/2023

Pamela L. Sale
Vice President, Forensics





NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS

Grants Full Accreditation
of

Tarrant County Medical Examiner Office - Fort Worth, Texas (#074-3121)

Inspected by and meets the Standards, Inspection, and Accreditation Criteria established by the National Association of Medical Examiners for providing and operating an effective Medicolegal Death Investigative System

Accreditation is granted for the period January 8, 2020 to January 8, 2024

GIVEN THIS 21st day of July, 2021



President

Secretary-Treasurer

Inspector

Chairman of Inspections Committee

2021 Statistics

2021 Statistical Summary

Reported deaths

16,163

Jurisdiction Terminated				11,133	68.9%
Jurisdiction accepted					
within the TCME District			4,172		25.8%
scenes investigated	1,056				
outside the TCME District			858		5.3%

Medical Procedures	3,862				
External Examination			1,743		
Partial Autopsy			228	4.5%	
Complete Autopsy			1,891	37.6%	
No Procedure (In Absentia)	1,171			23.3%	
Examination Reports Issued				5,033	

Bodies brought to facility				4,076	
Bodies sent for County Burial or Cremation				100	
Exhumations				0	

TCME District Deaths Certified				4,172	
Natural			1,964		47.1%
Accident			1,417		34.0%
vehicular	424			30.0%	
non-vehicular	993			70.0%	
Suicide			467		11.2%
Undetermined			104		2.5%
Homicide			220		5.3%
Non-Human Remains			6		

Human Identification				1,006	
Successfully identified			981		
observation (visual)	20	2.0%			
fingerprints	920	91.5%			
odontology	17	1.7%			
dna	4	0.4%			
comparative radiology	20	2.0%			
Pending Identification			6	0.6%	
Non-Human Remains			19	1.9%	

Manner of Death by County



2021 Tarrant County Deaths		
Manner of Death	Cases	%
Natural	1510	14.2%
Accidental	1071	10.1%
Suicide	318	3.0%
Homicide	199	1.9%
Undetermined	83	0.8%
Non-human remains	2	0.02%
Jurisdiction terminated	7456	70.1%
Total	10639	100%

2021 Denton County Deaths		
Manner of Death	Cases	%
Natural	251	8.0%
Accidental	243	7.7%
Suicide	105	3.3%
Homicide	14	0.4%
Undetermined	15	0.5%
Non-human remains	2	0.1%
Jurisdiction terminated	2511	79.9%
Total	3141	100.0%



2021 Parker County Deaths		
Manner of Death	Cases	%
Natural	103	14.3%
Accidental	55	7.6%
Suicide	21	2.9%
Homicide	4	0.6%
Undetermined	3	0.4%
Non-human remains	0	0.0%
Jurisdiction terminated	534	74.2%
Total	720	100.0%

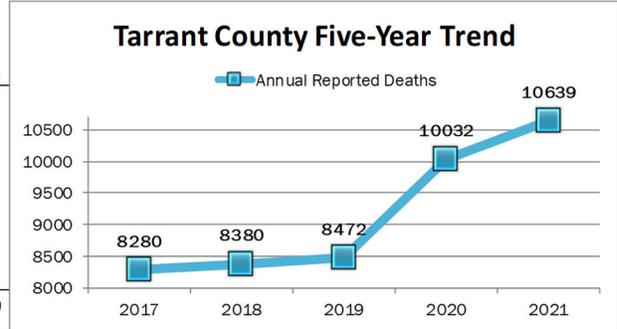
2021 Johnson County Deaths		
Manner of Death	Cases	%
Natural	100	14.1%
Accidental	48	6.8%
Suicide	23	3.2%
Homicide	3	0.4%
Undetermined	3	0.4%
Non-human remains	2	0.3%
Jurisdiction terminated	529	74.7%
Total	708	100.0%



Five-Year Trends

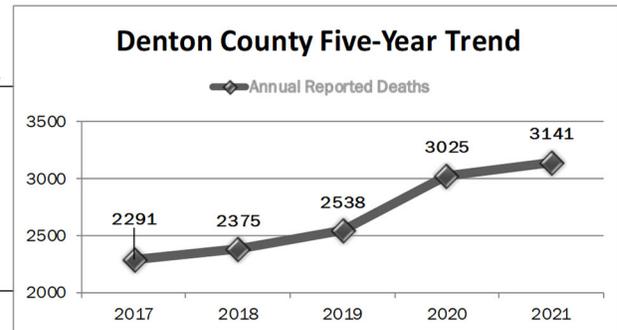
Tarrant County, 2017-2021

Manner of Death	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Natural	1230	1221	1222	1422	1510
Accident	663	668	676	814	1071
Suicide	267	284	283	268	318
Homicide	143	107	132	196	199
Undetermined	60	77	80	70	83
Non-human remains	4	7	9	8	2
Jurisdiction terminated	5913	6016	6070	7254	7456
Total	8280	8380	8472	10032	10639



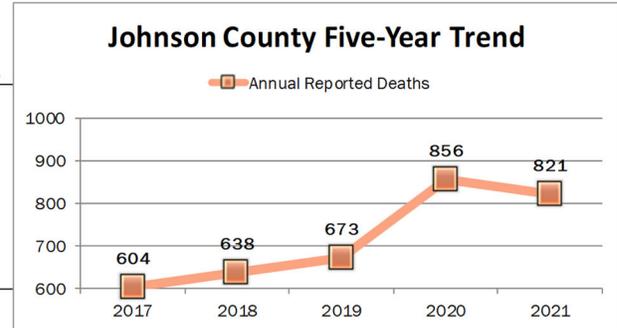
Denton County, 2017-2021

Manner of Death	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Natural	159	174	205	224	251
Accident	166	147	156	213	243
Suicide	98	87	99	87	105
Homicide	13	22	16	26	14
Undetermined	11	12	14	11	15
Non-human remains	0	1	0	0	2
Jurisdiction terminated	1844	1932	2048	2464	2511
Total	2291	2375	2538	3025	3141



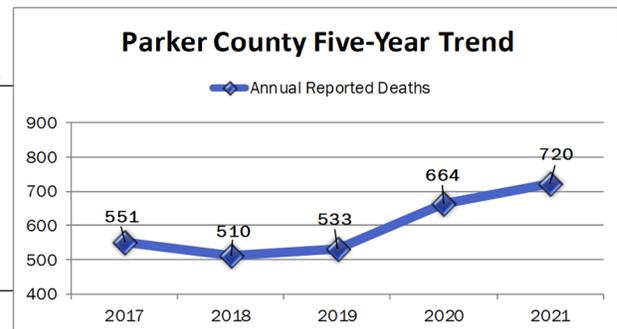
Johnson County, 2017-2021

Manner of Death	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Natural	57	81	65	108	100
Accident	33	43	51	43	48
Suicide	21	25	25	23	23
Homicide	3	4	1	1	3
Undetermined	3	8	2	1	3
Non-human remains	0	0	0	1	2
Jurisdiction terminated	487	477	529	679	642
Total	604	638	673	856	821



Parker County, 2017-2021

Manner of Death	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Natural	79	76	65	79	103
Accident	43	27	31	43	55
Suicide	19	24	19	24	21
Homicide	4	1	3	5	4
Undetermined	2	3	3	3	3
Non-human remains	0	0	0	0	0
Jurisdiction terminated	404	379	412	510	534
Total	551	510	533	664	720



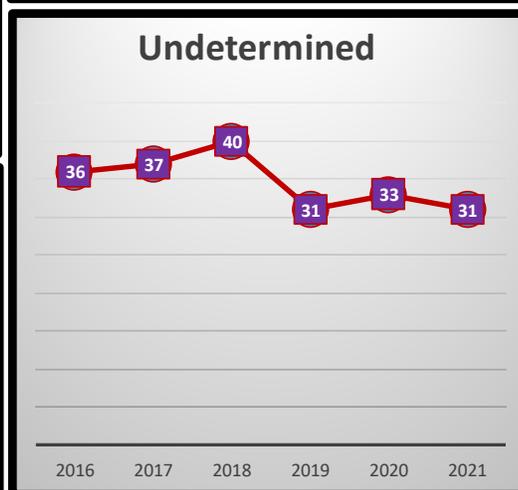
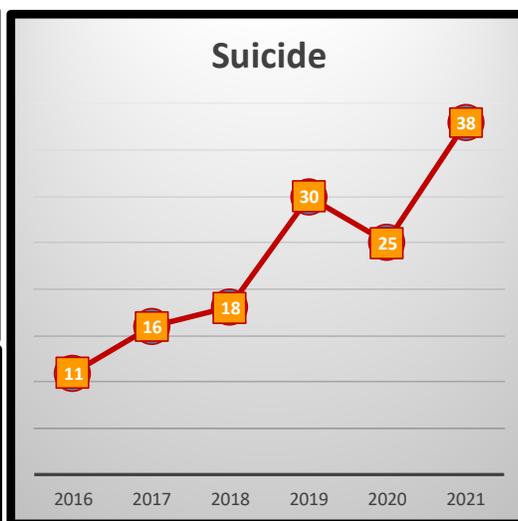
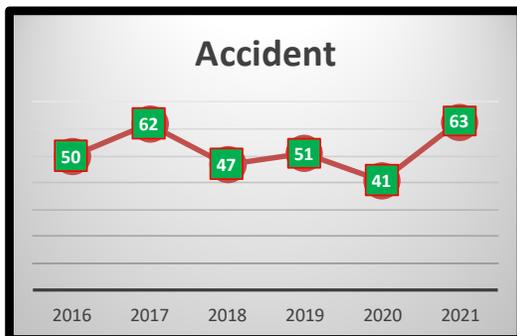
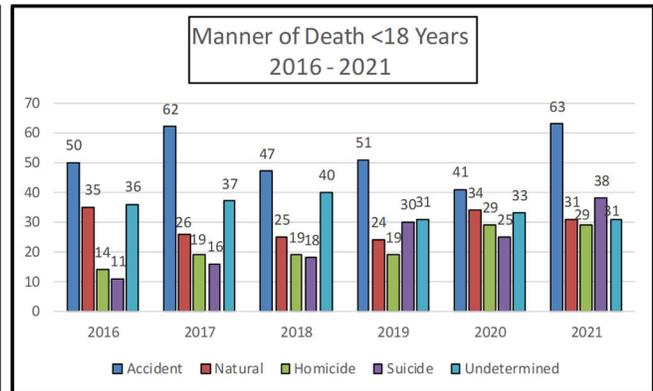
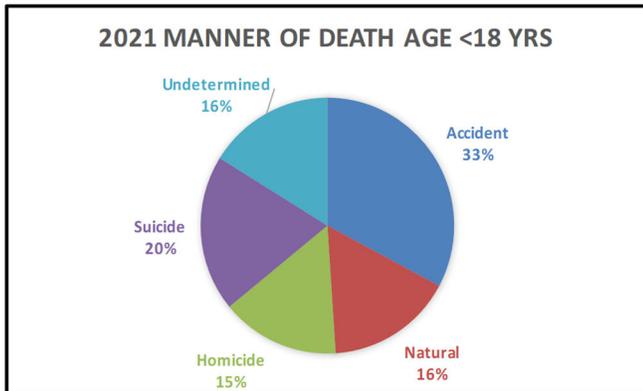
Accidents, Homicides, and Suicides

	Tarrant	Denton	Johnson	Parker	Total	%	Accidents by Method
Airplane	2	0	2	0	4	0.3%	
Alcohol	9	2	2	0	13	0.9%	
Asphyxiation	24	5	1	0	30	2.1%	
Bicycle	2	1	0	0	3	0.2%	
Boating	0	1	0	0	1	0.1%	
Drugs	404	88	14	23	529	37%	
Drowning	39	11	1	1	52	3.7%	
Electrocution	4	0	1	0	5	0.4%	
Environmental	8	2	0	1	11	0.8%	
Fall	239	55	3	11	308	22%	
Fire	3	4	1	0	8	0.6%	
Firearms	4	1	0	0	5	0.4%	
Industrial	5	1	0	0	6	0.4%	
Motor Vehicle	313	70	22	19	424	30%	
Other	12	1	1	0	14	1.0%	
Train	3	1	0	0	4	0.3%	
TOTAL	1071	243	48	55	1417	100%	

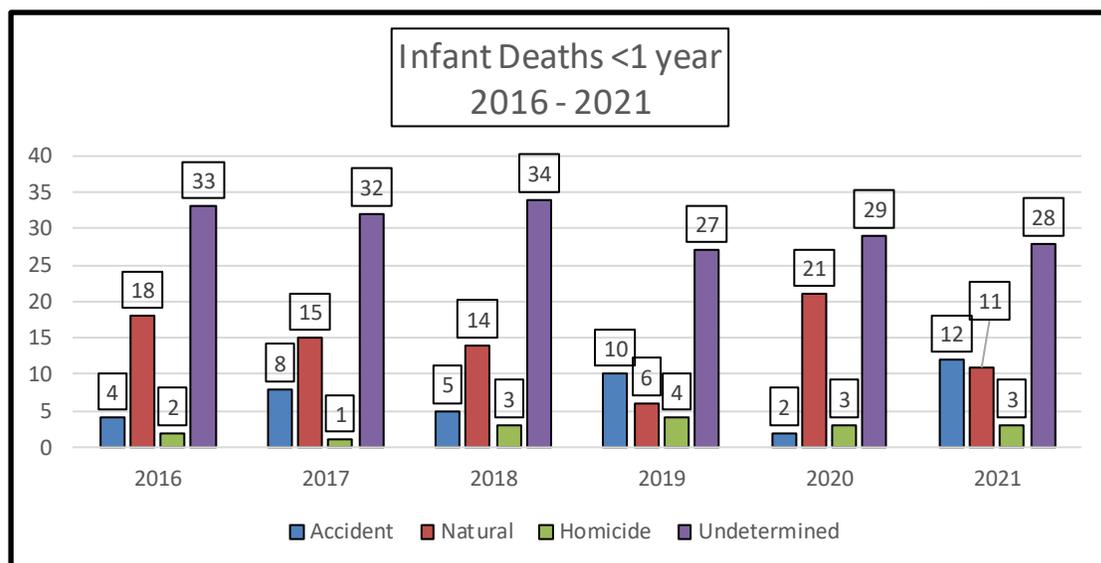
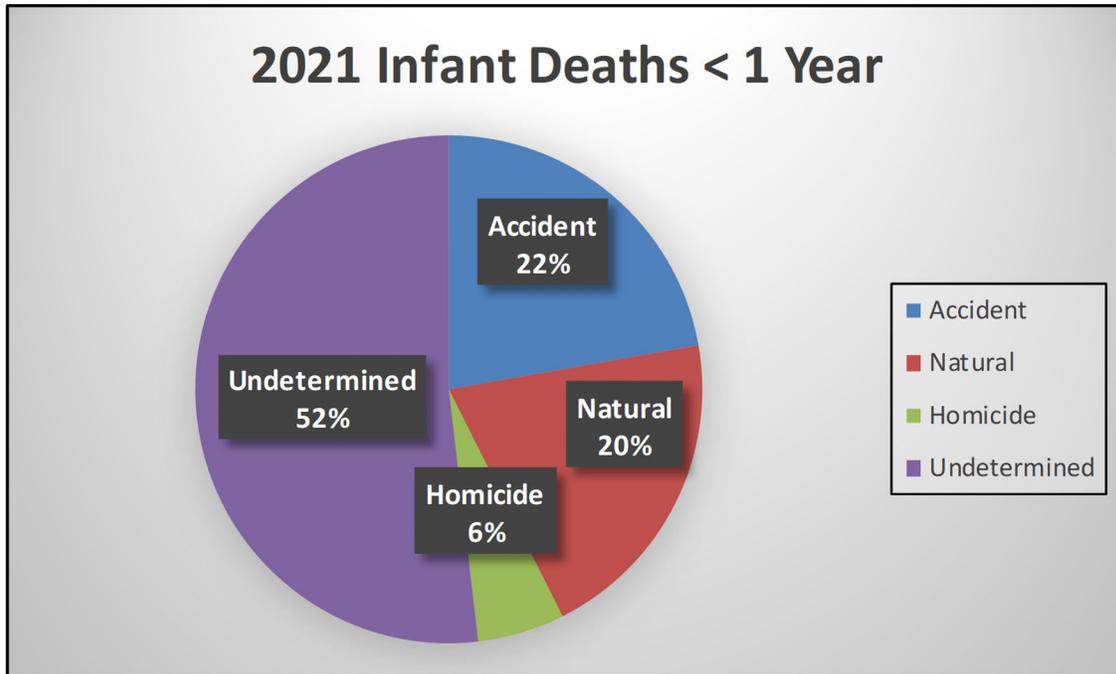
	Tarrant	Denton	Johnson	Parker	Total	%	Homicides by Method
Asphyxiation	0	2	0	0	2	0.9%	
Blunt Force	12	0	1	0	13	5.9%	
Firearms	159	12	2	4	177	80.5%	
Motor Vehicle	5	0	0	0	5	2.3%	
Sharp Force	17	0	0	0	17	7.7%	
Other	6	0	0	0	6	2.7%	
TOTAL	199	14	3	4	220	100%	

	Tarrant	Denton	Johnson	Parker	Total	%	Suicides by Method
Asphyxiation	1	3	0	1	5	1.1%	
Carbon Monoxide	3	0	0	1	4	0.9%	
Drowning	5	1	0	0	6	1.3%	
Drugs	28	10	1	2	41	8.8%	
Firearms	192	64	12	13	281	60.2%	
Hanging	73	25	9	4	111	23.8%	
Jumping	8	1	0	0	9	1.9%	
Motor Vehicle	2	1	1	0	4	0.9%	
Other	1	0	0	0	1	0.2%	
Sharp Force	2	0	0	0	2	0.4%	
Train	3	0	0	0	3	0.6%	
TOTAL	318	105	23	21	467	100%	

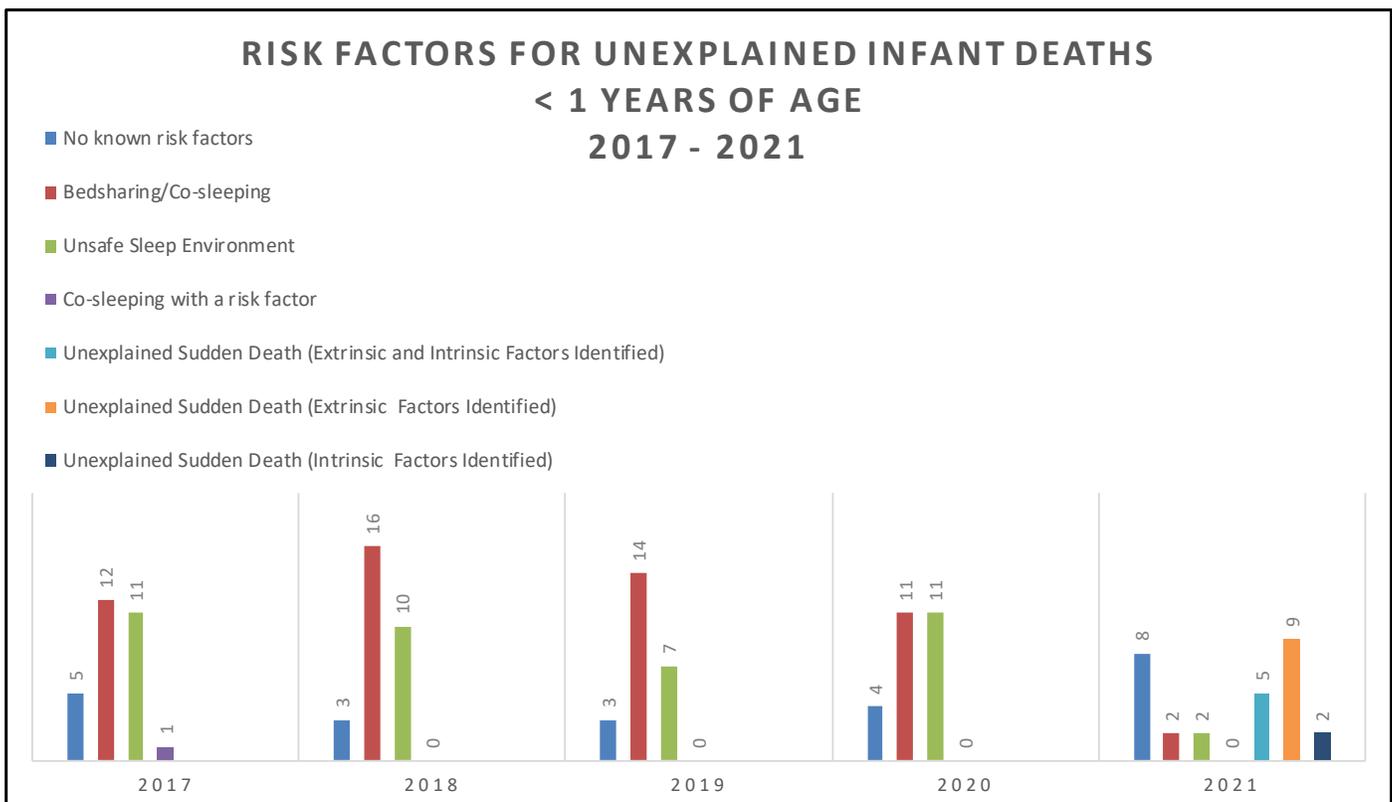
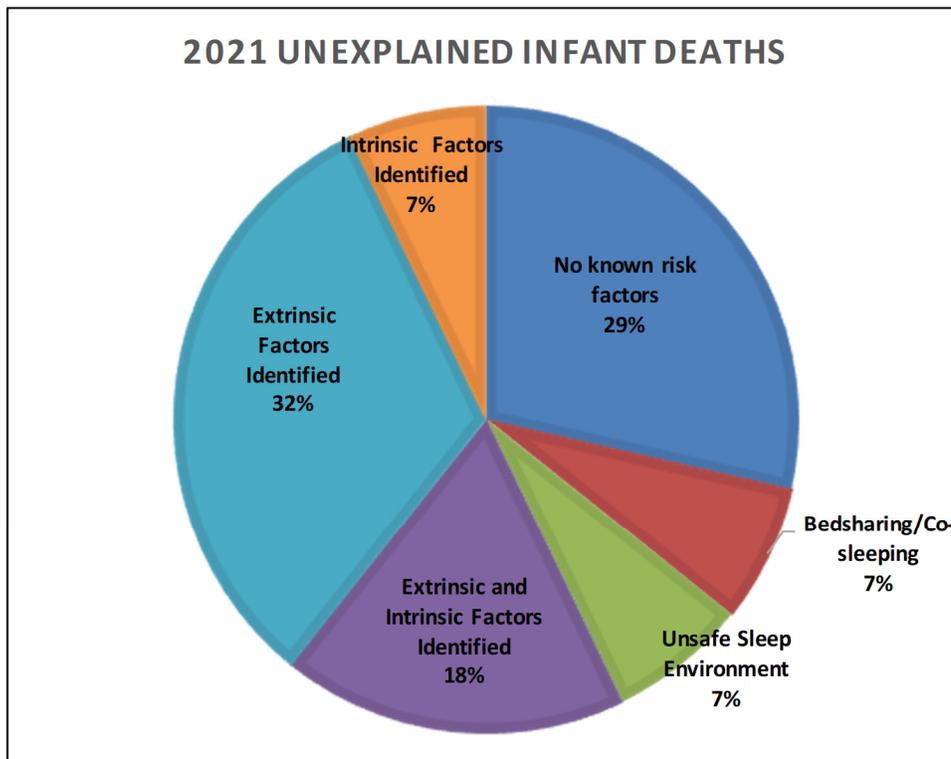
Pediatric Deaths < 18 Years



Infant Deaths < 1 Year



Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths



District Medical Procedures

2021 Medical Procedures by County						
County	Autopsy	Partial Autopsy	External Exam	Medical Exams	In Absentia (No Exam)	County Inquests
Denton	181	28	279	488	136	624
Johnson	37	9	85	131	50	181
Parker	43	16	81	140	43	183
Tarrant	889	162	1194	2245	942	3187
Other	741	13	104	858	0	858
Total	1891	228	1743	3862	1171	5033



Examination Type by Manner of Death					
Exam Type	Accident	Homicide	Natural	Suicide	Undetermined
Autopsy	36%	98%	14%	18%	86%
Partial Autopsy	2%	0%	5%	19%	1%
External	34%	2%	43%	63%	13%
In Absentia- No Exam (Medical Review)	28%	0%	39%	0%	0%

Completion Times for Inquests

2021 Within District Completion Time Percentages		
	# Cases	Percentage
Number of Cases Completed within 30 days	1594	38%
Number of Cases Completed within 60 days	2126	51%
Number of Cases Completed within 90 days	3218	77%
Number of Cases Completed greater than 90 days	956	23%
Total District Cases	4175	

2021 Outside District Completion Time Percentages		
	# Cases	Percentage
Number of Cases Completed within 30 days	158	18%
Number of Cases Completed within 60 days	351	41%
Number of Cases Completed within 90 days	602	70%
Number of Cases Completed greater than 90 days	256	30%
Total Non-District Cases	858	

2021 All Case Completion Time Percentages		
	# Cases	Percentage
Number of Cases Completed within 30 days	1752	35%
Number of Cases Completed within 60 days	2477	49%
Number of Cases Completed within 90 days	3820	76%
Number of Cases Completed greater than 90 days	1212	24%
Total Cases	5033	

Departments in Depth

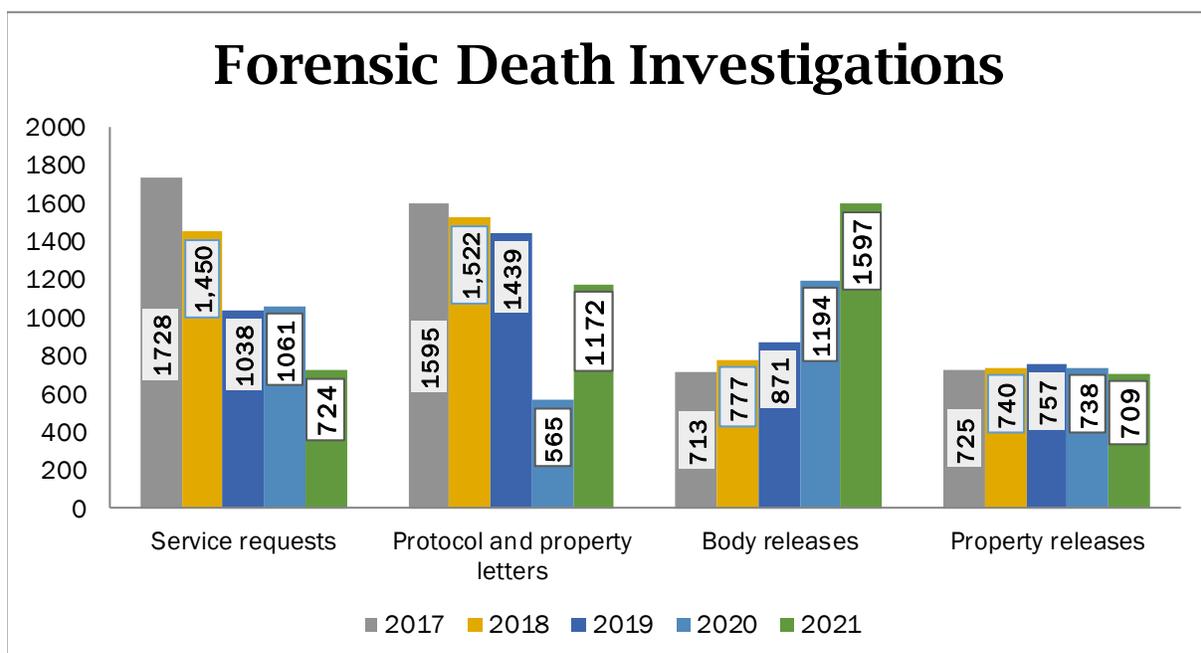


Forensic Death Investigation

Forensic Death Investigation conducts investigations into the cause and manner of deaths occurring within its jurisdiction of Tarrant, Denton, Johnson, and Parker counties. Staffed around-the-clock, the department is responsible for initiating a formal response to all reportable deaths, which totaled **16,163** in **2021**.

Trained across multiple disciplines, forensic investigators boast a distinctive array of knowledge, including criminal investigation techniques, relevant aspects of forensic medicine, crime scene processing skills, and methods of maintaining case integrity. Moreover, each investigator must be able to conduct effective interviews, locate and notify next of kin, and interact appropriately with law enforcement personnel.

Once the Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s office assumes jurisdiction of a case, the investigator attends the scene or the hospital at which death occurred. After conducting the initial investigation, the investigator prepares a detailed case report containing biographical data on the decedent, a narrative of the events leading up to the time of death or discovery of the decedent, and a summary of all analyses and leads obtained. Investigators further coordinate with health care providers, members of law enforcement, employers, families, and other pertinent sources to gather information that may be of value in determining the cause and manner of death.



Human Identification Services



Identification of unidentified remains, a primary function of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office, is a legal determination important for both legal and humanitarian reasons. The process requires a holistic approach that takes into consideration all available scientific and contextual evidence. For most people, having a loved one at a morgue for postmortem examination is stressful; hence, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office strives to mitigate this by timely identification within the scope defined by [Statute 49.25, Section §9 of the Texas State Code of Criminal Procedure](#).

The Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office established the Human Identification Laboratory in the mid-1990s as a standalone facility, a concept then unique among medical examiner's offices in the United States. This laboratory is charged with the responsibility of investigating and attempting to identify all decedents presented to the District as "unidentified." The Human Identification Laboratory additionally verifies the identity of all homicide victims examined by the office.

During 2021, the Human Identification Laboratory worked 1,006 cases with the following results:

- Positive identifications of 981 individuals
- 6 cases are pending identification
- 19 cases are non-human remains
- 27 autopsy consultations

Anthropology

The [Forensic Anthropology Laboratory](#) examines the human skeletal system to provide information for unidentified persons, to assess skeletal trauma, and to rule out non-human remains. To assist examiners in determining the cause and manner of death, skeletal trauma is evaluated. The most common analysis is of neck structures in asphyxia deaths; however blunt force including gunshot wounds, sharp force, including dismemberment, and the timing of healing injuries are commonly evaluated in the Forensic Anthropology Laboratory. The laboratory works with volunteer members from other TCME labs and the Tarrant County Sheriff's Office to recover remains from clandestine burials, bones that are scattered on the ground surface and other indoor and outdoor scenarios. When confirmation of a tentative identification is not possible, the laboratory provides a biological profile that may include such as sex, genetic ancestry, age, stature and individualizing characteristics such as evidence of surgery, disease, or healing bone fractures. For individuals with a tentative identification, medical imaging comparisons often establish scientifically the identity of a body.



Morgue Services

The heart of activity of any medical examiner's facility, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office morgue was dedicated in 1989 and employs a design that centralizes morgue activity, effectively connecting interrelated morgue functions while isolating it from other work areas of the building. This design limits pathogen exposure and enables examiners and technicians to work with minimum interruption.



The morgue's autopsy technicians, assist the medical examiners in forensic examination. Each technician is responsible for obtaining photographs, radiographs (x-rays), fingerprints, and biological samples from the decedent during an autopsy exam.

Because the identification of foreign bodies in or on a decedent is vitally important to a comprehensive examination, the medical examiner's office relies on radiography tools like a full-body x-ray system (LODOX) and a traditional digital x-ray system, which enables imaging of the body without prior removal from the transport gurney. Other tools include a fixed flat plate device and articulated dental radiography equipment.

Evidence Services

In order to preserve evidentiary integrity, each piece of evidence collected by or submitted to the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office must be paired with a detailed chain-of-custody log. Forensic technicians with expertise in evidentiary preservation maintain and secure chain-of-custody to ensure that all evidence is handled and stored properly.

Drug Chemistry & Toxicology

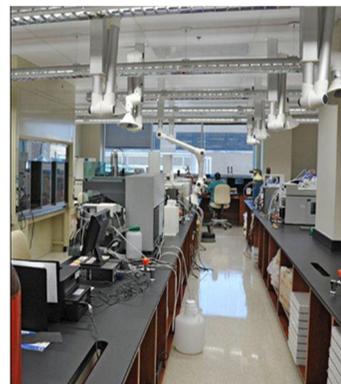
Forensic chemists analyze drugs submitted by other agencies. Drug types received commonly range from clandestine chemical substances to the therapeutic or prescribed medications. Cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and amphetamines, all drugs of abuse, represent the most common products received for chemical assay. Daily, law enforcement agencies within the TCME District are faced with the challenge of identifying drugs found following an arrest or search warrant execution.

Breath Alcohol Program

An Intoxilyzer instrument measures a sample of breath for determinable levels of alcohol concentration, providing an objective, scientific means of testing someone who is suspected by police to have been driving under the influence of alcohol. In 1994, using grant funds supplied by the Texas Department of Transportation, the Intoxilyzer program was established at the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office. Under the program, forensic chemists establish Intoxilyzer test sites, calibrate and maintain equipment, and train Intoxilyzer operators, which benefits local police agencies. After twenty-seven (27) successful years in assisting the Texas Department of Transportation with alcohol related cases, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner finalized its participation in the program in 2021.

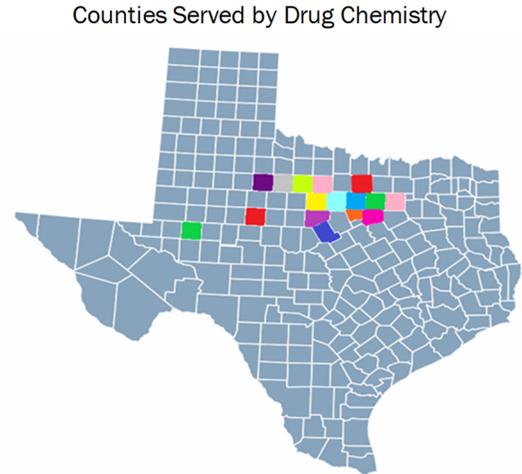
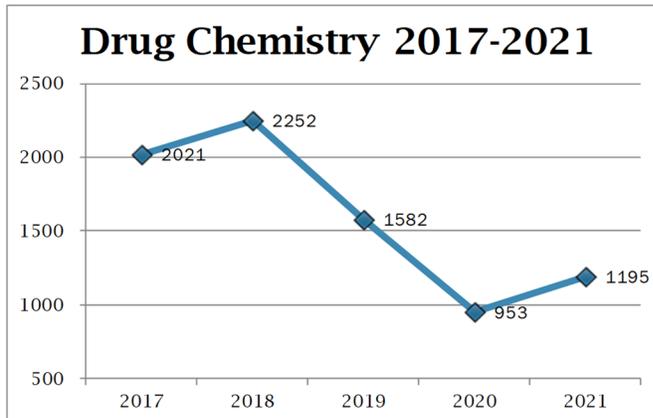
Forensic Toxicology

Established at the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's office in 1983, the toxicology laboratory has subsequently expanded to include mass spectrometry, gas chromatography, and high-pressure liquid chromatography analysis. The toxicology laboratory provides drug testing to assist the medical examiners in determining the cause and manner of death by isolating, identifying, and determining the level of chemicals present in specimens. The forensic toxicology laboratory also participates regularly in established analytical proficiency testing and quality assurance programs.



Drug Chemistry

2021 saw a increase in casework by approximately 25% and the average turnaround time was 25 days to complete a case.



Average cases per month, 2021

100

132

Highest monthly caseload 2021

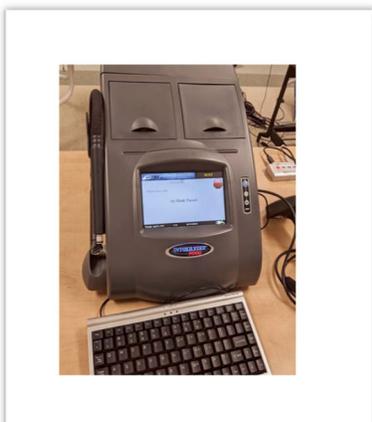
Lowest monthly caseload 2021

75

133

5-year average cases/month

Breath Alcohol

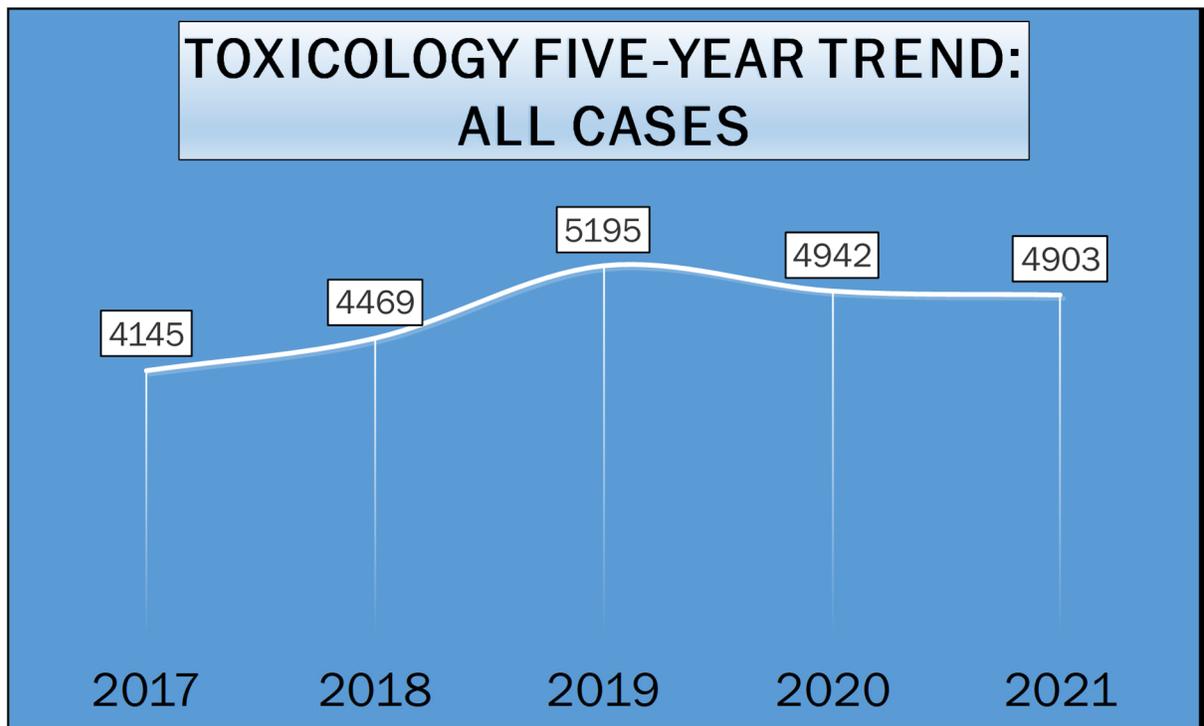


Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office Breath Alcohol program is accredited by ANAB in the field of Forensic Calibration. The office maintains nineteen Intoxilyzer instruments located throughout fifteen local agencies. The technical supervisor plays a key role in Administration License Revocation hearings with testimony. In addition, the technical supervisor assists the State by recertifying Breath Test Operators annually.

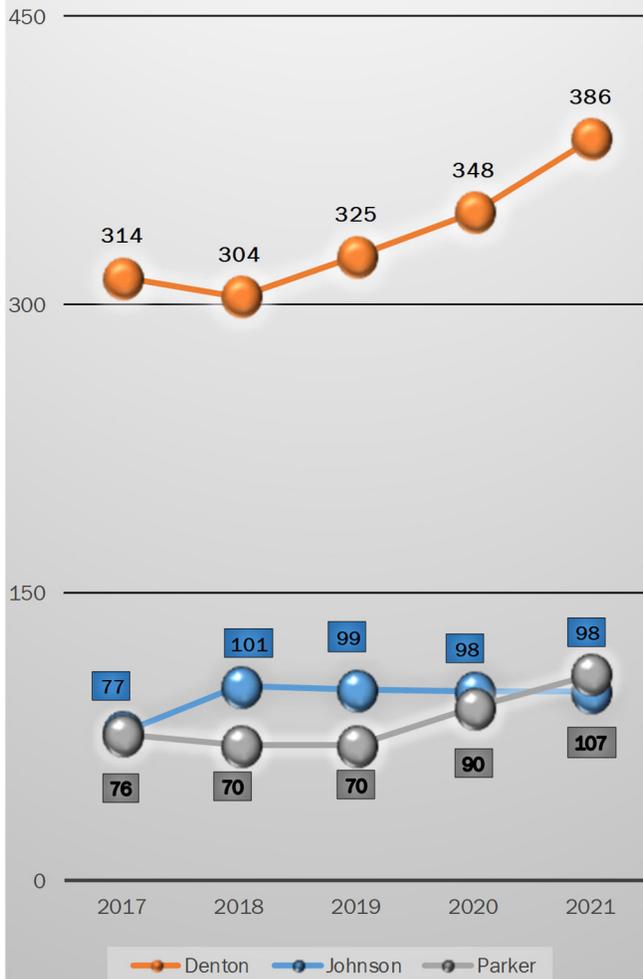
Toxicology

In 2021, Toxicology cases from the four counties in the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District totaled 2360 up 15% from 2055 the previous year, and accounting for 48% of all Toxicology cases. Other medical examiner (782) and outside agency (1761) cases bring the total cases completed by the Toxicology laboratory in 2021 to 4903, representing less than one percent decrease from 4942 from 2020.

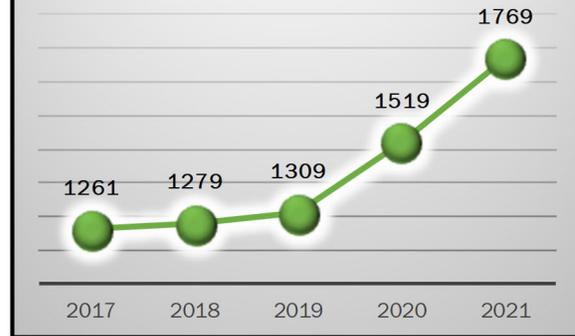
Outside cases, which typically include DWI, DFSA (drug-facilitated sexual assault), and defense attorney cases, decreased by 7% from 1892 cases in 2020 to 1761 cases in 2021. DWI cases continue to be more complex as fewer cases involve alcohol analysis only and more service requests are made for court-ordered retest. The average turnaround time to complete a toxicology service request was 27 days.



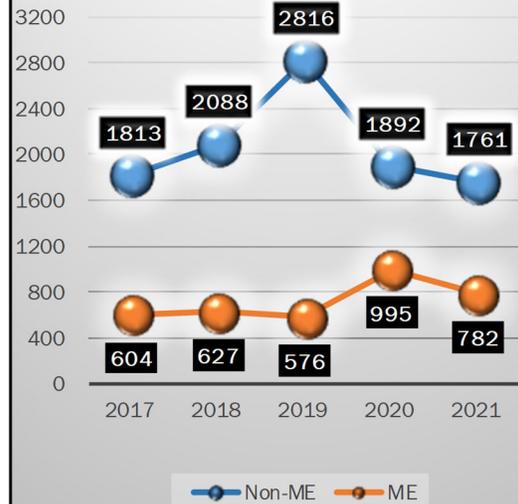
Toxicology Five-year Trend: Denton, Parker, and Johnson Counties



Toxicology Five-year Trend: Tarrant County



Toxicology Five-year Trend: Other Cases



	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021						
						Tarrant	Denton	Johnson	Parker	Other		Total
										ME	Non-ME	
JAN	405	427	477	589	509	144	29	6	6	88	125	398
FEB	395	385	314	455	481	143	31	6	8	67	97	352
MAR	407	353	377	374	397	147	33	14	10	76	179	459
APR	375	354	340	410	357	133	40	10	5	79	163	430
MAY	358	372	388	404	414	148	36	8	5	70	150	417
JUN	370	351	330	355	415	164	36	14	7	89	158	468
JUL	404	316	322	433	450	149	28	2	7	60	170	416
AUG	412	345	324	429	407	145	22	6	15	76	162	426
SEP	393	298	307	417	388	184	28	13	10	67	128	430
OCT	273	288	460	443	355	127	38	2	14	38	167	386
NOV	341	323	442	438	366	137	31	9	7	36	119	339
DEC	328	333	388	448	403	148	34	8	13	36	143	382
TOTAL	4461	4145	4469	5195	4942	1769	386	98	107	782	1761	4903

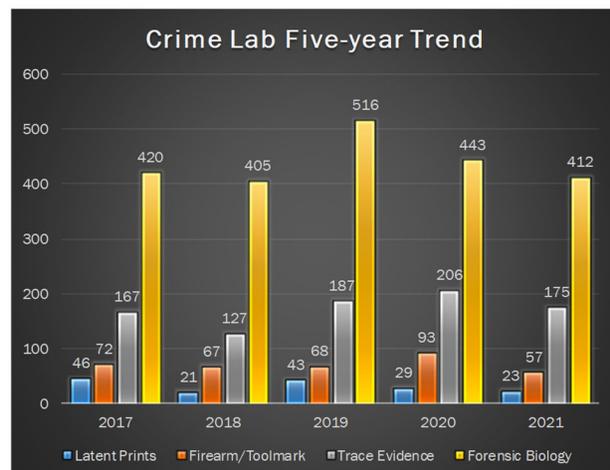
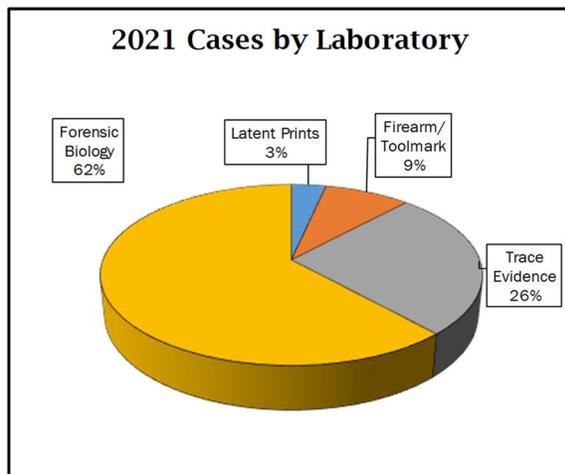
Criminalistics

Since 1989, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s Office has operated a full-service crime laboratory, serving the needs of not only its medical examiners, but also of law enforcement agencies and district attorney’s offices in North Central Texas and throughout the United States.

Equipped with modern analytical instrumentation, the various sections of the crime laboratory combine scientific technology with an experienced professional staff. The five specialized sections of the crime laboratory identify, analyze, and report on such forms of evidence as DNA, blood spatter, trace materials, chemical compounds, firearms, tool marks, and latent fingerprints.

In 2016, the Trace Evidence laboratory expanded the scope of their ANAB International accreditation to include imprint/impression evidence comparisons (footwear and tire tread examinations),

Criminalistics Cases by Laboratory				
	Latent Prints	Firearm/ Toolmark	Trace Evidence	Forensic Biology
Total reports issued in 2021	23	57	175	412
Reports issued within TCMED	19	47	158	369
Reports issued outside TCMED	4	10	17	43
TCME or law enforcement on TCME case	12	29	102	52
Non-ME case	10	13	65	360



Forensic Biology

DNA analysis provides the ability to restrict the potential population of persons to whom a biological sample might belong to a much smaller subset of suspects. This helps identify the source of a sample and connect it to a particular death or crime scene.

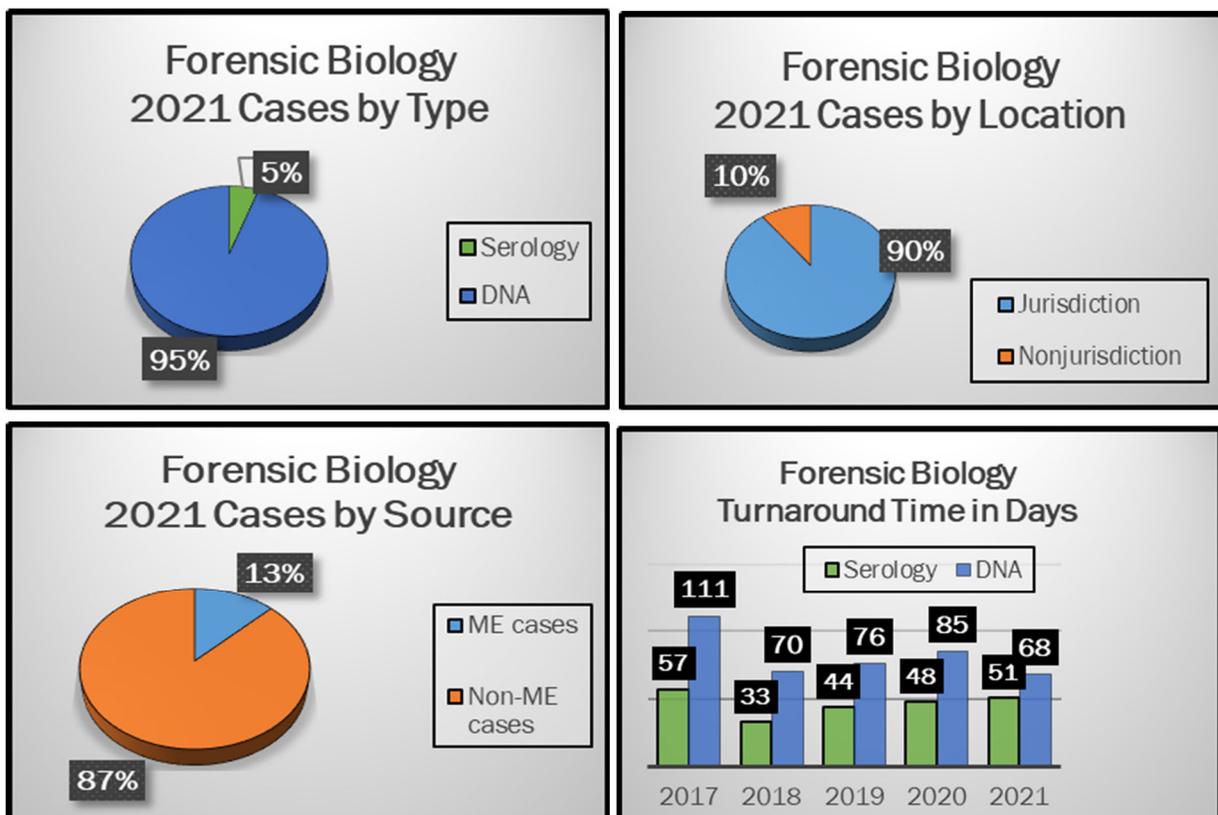
The Tarrant County Medical Examiner's DNA unit is a designated CODIS (Combined DNA Index System) laboratory. CODIS is the FBI's DNA database that ultimately links all 50 states and 18 countries in order to compare forensic casework profiles.

A database search can provide significant investigative leads and may link unsolved cases to a single perpetrator.

Forensic Biology issued 412 reports for cases in 2021.

These cases are categorized below by *type* (serology or DNA), *source* (requestor), and *location* (within or without the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District). This is a 7% decrease from 443 cases reported in 2020.

The average turnaround time for 2021 is 51 days for serology cases and 68 days for



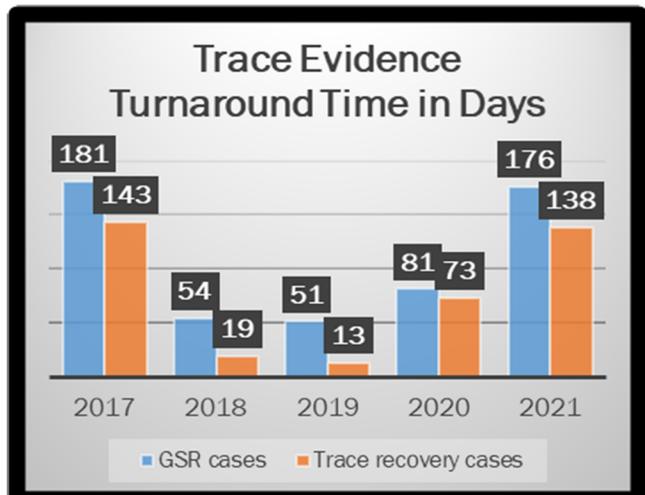
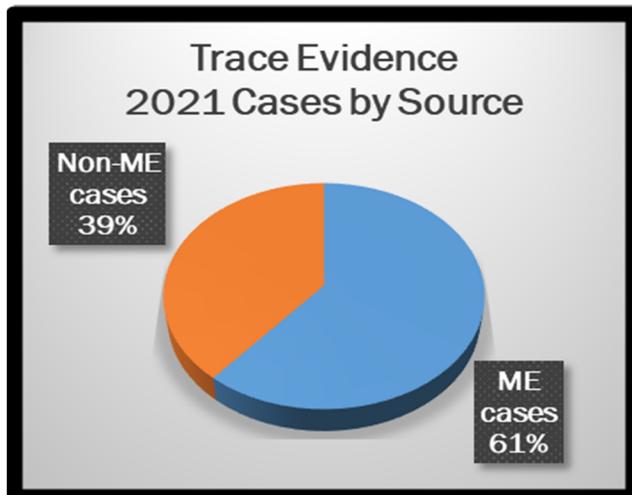
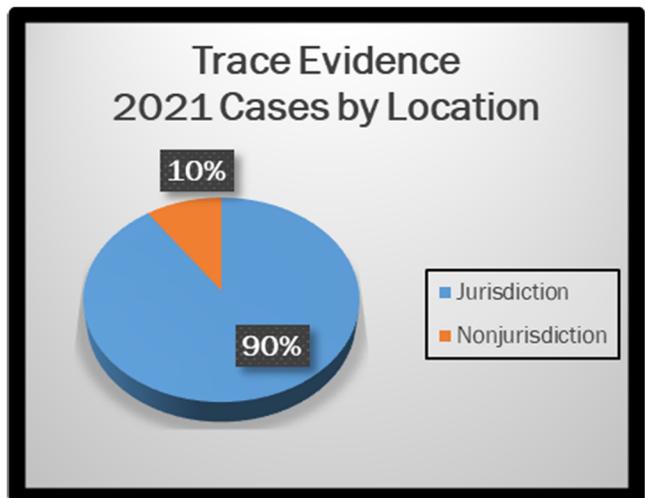
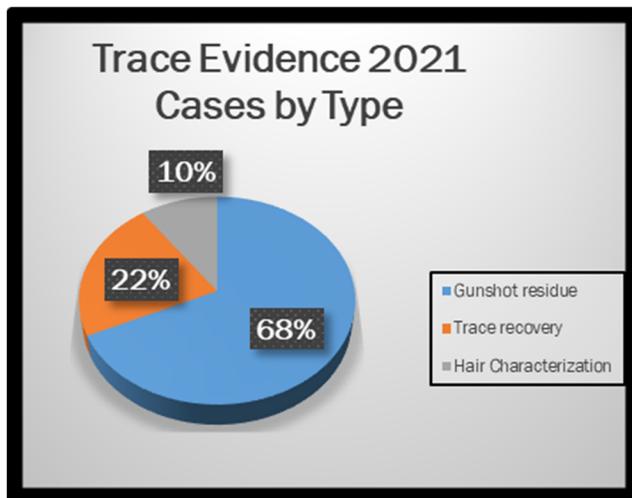
Trace Evidence

Trace evidence is material that can be easily transferred from one site to another because of its size or weight. During the commission of a crime, substances may be transferred between people or objects or acquired from the surrounding environment. Gunshot residue, hair, glass, paint, and fibers are items commonly submitted for examination.

Trace analysis uses advanced technology and instrumentation to obtain chemical profiles of materials, in order to relate them to each other or to a common source. This enables investigators to potentially link a suspect and a victim to a shared location.

Trace Evidence issued reports on 175 cases in 2021. These cases are categorized at below by *type* (gunshot residue or trace recovery), *source* (requestor), and *location* (within or without the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District). This was a 15% decrease from the 206 cases reported in 2020.

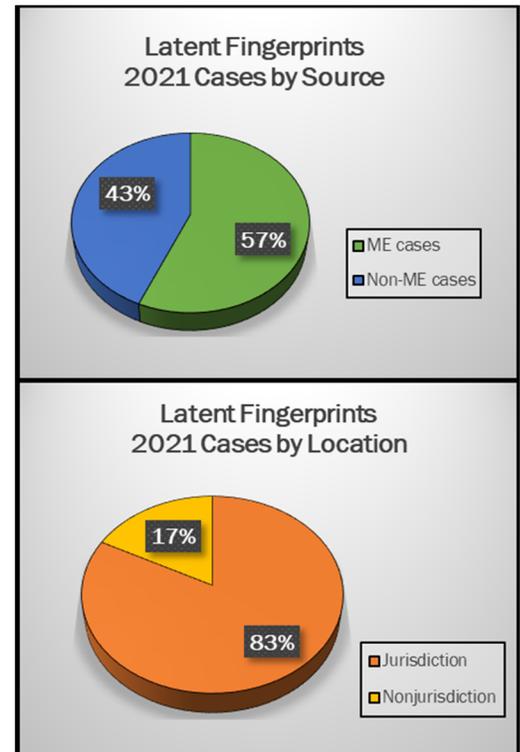
In 2021, the average turnaround time to complete services is 176 days for GSR and 138 days for trace recovery.



Latent Fingerprints

A fundamental tool of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office, latent fingerprint examination helps to identify bodies that arrive to the morgue unidentified. Latent prints can also be retrieved from submitted evidence and used to assist in identifying a criminal suspect. Using the newest technology and considerable expertise, the latent print examiner achieves remarkable results in lifting prints from various substrates.

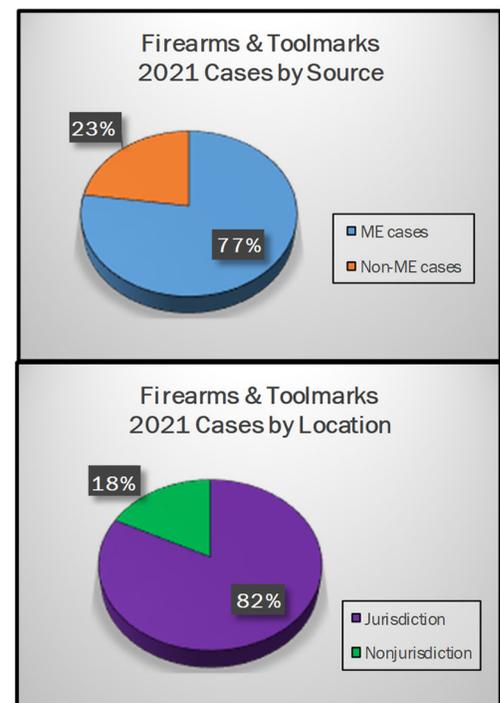
Latent Fingerprints issued reports on 23 cases in 2021. These cases are categorized at right by *source* (requestor) and *location* (within or without the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District). This is a 20% decrease from the reported 29 cases in 2020.



Firearms and Toolmarks

Much as its name suggests, this laboratory analyzes firearms, projectiles, ballistics, and markings imparted by any form of tool. Firearms submitted are examined for inherent characteristics, unique identifiers, and safety-related factors. They can also be test-fired to obtain reference material that can subsequently be compared to submitted evidence. The laboratory boasts a 40-foot indoor firing range, used to carry out range-of-fire determinations.

Firearms and Toolmarks issued reports on 57 cases in 2021. These cases are categorized at right by *source* (requestor) and *location* (within or without the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District). This is a 39% decrease from 93 cases in 2020.



Forensic Photography

A fully equipped forensic photography laboratory was added to the Criminalistics Laboratory of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office in 1994. By 2005, Forensic Photography had replaced all film processing with digital photography.

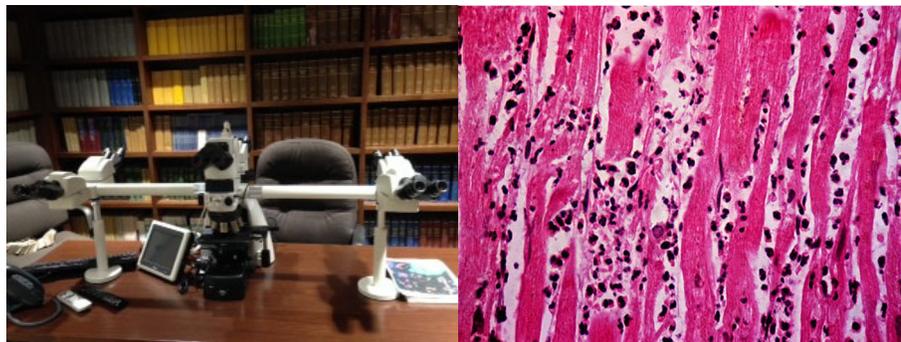
In addition to more traditional photography, the laboratory is capable of making photographs using ultraviolet and infrared techniques. Image enhancement can also be performed. Pictures, enlargements, and other services are provided to medical examiners, courts, and individuals for educational or research-based presentations.



Forensic Histology

Histological examination is the microscopic study of tissues and cells. The histology department assists the pathologists in determining the cause of death by preparing slides for microscopic examination. After processing and sectioning the tissue, the histologist submits the completed slide to the forensic pathologist for examination. Some cause-of-death determinations rely solely upon the examination of the decedent's tissues and organs. The histology plays a vital role in helping the pathologist with identifying disease processes and certain tissue changes that occur in response to trauma, lifestyle habits and other variables.

In 2021 the Forensic Histology laboratory worked 510 cases and produced 5,688 microscopic slides for examination for the counties served by the Tarrant County Medical Examiner District.



Organ & Tissue Procurement

Organ Tissue Report From	January 1, 2021	TO	December 31, 2021	
Organs			Tissues	
Bladder	1		Adrenal(s)	4
Heart(Organ)	10		Bone	51
Intestines	0		Cartilage	3
Kidney(s)	21		Dura Mater	0
Liver	15		Eyes	49
Lung(s)	8		Corenea(s)	49
Pancreas	5		Globe(s)	0
Reproductive	0		Fascia	17
Male	0		Heart(Valves)	1
Female	0		Peritoneal Membrane	0
Other	7		Tendon(s)	20

Administrative & Facility Support

Secretarial Services

Secretaries for the medical examiner's office work directly with the public, assisting bereaved families, law enforcement personnel, judicial authorities, healthcare providers, and funeral directors through what many people understandably find to be a difficult and perplexing time. Each medical examiner is assigned a secretary, who provides the administrative support services necessary to the daily operation of the business. Additional services provided by the secretarial team include issuing death certificates and medical amendments, preparing and distributing cremation permits, transcribing autopsy reports, managing case records, documenting continuing medical education (CME) credits, and producing other business reports.

Business Office

The Business Office was established to meet the increasing complexities of the day-to-day management of the business aspects of the TCME. The Business Manager and Bookkeeper comprise the office and carry out budgeting, contracting, financial reporting, accounts payable, accounts receivable, personnel timekeeping, and other related fiscal tasks. The Business Office also maintains inventory of all supplies, office equipment, and scientific equipment, and ensures all service warranties are current. The Transportation of Human Remains contract, a key requirement of business operation, is also supervised by the Business Manager.

Building Superintendent

Responsible for all general maintenance of the building, the Building Superintendent oversees vendors and contractors to ensure work is performed properly, and supervises work-release individuals assigned to janitorial and grounds duties. This role is especially vital in maintaining the ventilation and air conditioning requirements unique to a medical examiner's office, with its inherent biohazards and significant investment in scientific instruments that cannot tolerate temperature changes.

Education in the Office

For there are some who long to know for the sole purpose of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity; others who long to know in order to become known, and that is shameful vanity . . . others still who long for knowledge in order to sell its fruits for money or honors, and this is shameful profiteering; others again who long to know in order to be of service, and this is charity. —Bernard of Clairvaux

Staff of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s Office meet regularly to review cases, continue professional education, and exchange ideas. A lecture calendar is published and distributed each month to encourage participation.

Critical Case Review

A meeting for pathologist occurs daily in the afternoon to review cases together. Critical Case Review gives the medical examiners time to discuss their most complex or high-profile cases with each other and with key members of staff from the investigative, laboratory, and identification sections of the office. Unexpected findings, unusual developments, and contradictory evidence are all reviewed and analyzed before a consensus regarding cause and manner of death is reached. In particularly difficult cases, examiners may agree to “re-pond” a case and review it again at a later Critical Case Review, while the case’s medical examiner solicits more information by ordering specialized testing, seeking law enforcement agency input, requesting more medical records, or some combination thereof.

A summary of reviewed cases and their disposition is produced by the meeting’s scribe and submitted to qualify Critical Case Review meetings for Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits. In this way, Critical Case Review fulfills two needs at once and enables medical examiners to spend more of their time working on cases for the District.

Child Mortality Case Review (Monthly)

A “cousin” of Critical Case Review, Child Mortality Case Review was born of the desire to increase transparency with child welfare advocates and educate health, law, and social service agencies about the rigorous process of determining cause and manner of death in pediatric cases. It is limited to cases in which (1) the decedent is between 0 and 17 years of age at the time of death and (2) the death occurred within Tarrant County.

As with Critical Case Review, a summary of reviewed cases and their disposition is produced by the meeting’s scribe and submitted to qualify these meetings for Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits, again helping medical examiners spend more of their time completing cases.

Grand Rounds (Near-Weekly)

At 8:00 a.m. most Tuesdays of the year, excluding those following Monday holidays, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office hosts an hour-long presentation given by an invited speaker or by a member of our staff on a range of topics in the fields of forensics, law, health, and medicine. Audiences are typically drawn from medical students, healthcare providers, and law enforcement personnel.

Journal Club (Monthly)

The Journal Club meets for lunch in the second floor library of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s Office. A scholarly article in forensics, medicine, or a closely-related discipline is selected ahead of time for discussion to help participants stay better informed of developments in their fields.

Morning Mortality Conference (Daily)

Each morning at 8:30 a.m., the forensic pathologists of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s Office meet to review the day’s schedule of cases, determine what procedure (autopsy, partial autopsy, or external examination) each case requires, and assign cases to each examiner. In this way cases are triaged effectively, much as they would be in a hospital or clinical setting. Morning Mortality also serves as a short-form Critical Case Review, in that guidance may be sought from the group on how best to proceed with complex or sensitive cases.

