



North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
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NC Child Fatality Prevention Team
Executive Summary of 2014 Child Deaths in NC

A summary of child deaths investigated by the NC Medical Examiner
System and reviewed by the NC Child Fatality Prevention Team

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North Carolina Child Fatality Prevention Team

The statutory function of the North Carolina Child Fatality Prevention Team (CFPT) is to “review current deaths of children when those deaths are attributed to child abuse or neglect or when the decedent was reported as an abused or neglected juvenile pursuant to G.S. 7B-301 at any time before death.” In practice, the CFPT reviews all deaths of children under the age of 18 years that are investigated by the North Carolina Medical Examiner System. Deaths investigated by medical examiners include *apparent accidents*, *homicides*, suicides, violent deaths, deaths occurring under suspicious circumstances, and sudden and unexpected deaths. The CFPT reviews provide a detailed analysis of factors that may have contributed to a child’s death. The information gained from these reviews is compiled and analyzed with the purpose of making recommendations to the NC Child Fatality Task Force to support the creation of, or change in, laws, rules or policies in an effort to promote the safety and well-being of children in North Carolina.

Activities of the Child Fatality Prevention Team

The CFPT keeps the interest and safety of NC children in mind by:

- Regularly reviewing and updating the law enforcement investigation check list in an effort to collect the most detailed and pertinent information for each death
- Creating a form in order to mainstream the State Team’s review process
- Updating the State Team Manual
- Developing a website to provide access and information to community members
- Providing specialized training in death scene reconstruction

The CFPT continues to:

- Provide data to prevention partners, the media, and researchers
- Provide state-wide child death investigation trainings
- Create reports and presentations for a variety of relevant agencies and organizations focused on child well-being
- Create new and strengthen existing relationships with child fatality prevention partners

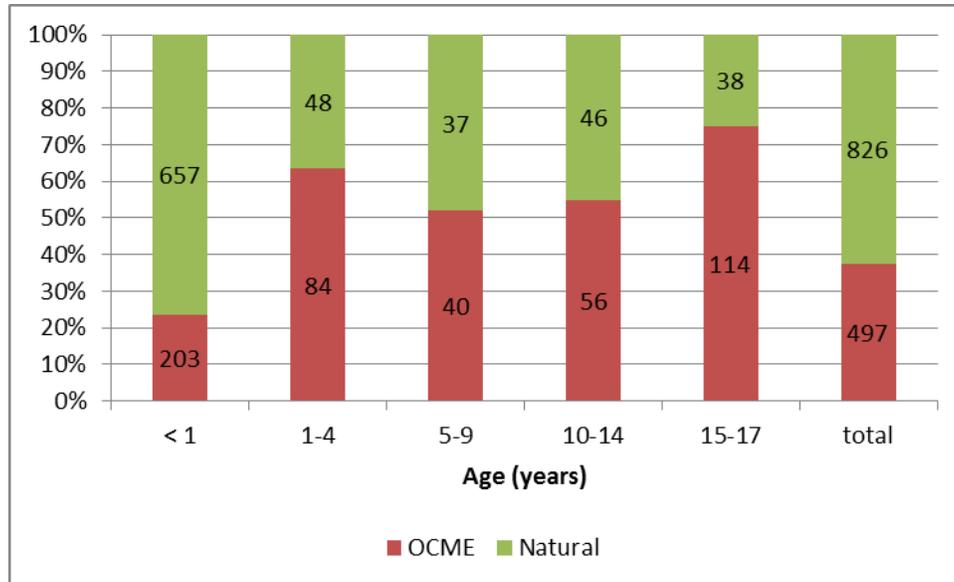
DATA AVAILABILITY

Reports and information are collected from public and confidential sources. The information collected by the CFPT can only be released in aggregate form. Detailed reports of child fatality data can be found at www.ocme.dhhs.nc.gov. Additional reports and data may be available by request. For further information, or to make a data request, please contact:

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TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS 2014
North Carolina Residents under the Age of 18 Years

The State Center for Health Statistics (SCHS) reported that in 2014, **1323** children died in North Carolina. Many of these deaths were expected and included children who died from a known natural disease or illness. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated the cause and manner of death for **497** of the child fatalities. The cases investigated by the Medical Examiner System included a number of natural deaths, as well as accidental deaths, homicides, suicides, and deaths in which no cause and/or manner of death was determined.



The CFPT reviews only child fatalities that are investigated by the OCME. Therefore, approximately 38% of all child deaths that occurred in North Carolina were reviewed by the CFPT. These deaths are categorized as follows:

HOMICIDES

There were 38 children who died at the hands of another in 2014. The CFPT separates homicides into 2 categories; homicides that occur at the hands of a parent or caregiver and homicides that do not.

Homicide by Parent or Caregiver

Homicide by Parent or Caretaker deaths accounted for 15 of the 38 total child homicides in 2014. Infants accounted for 6 deaths, and toddlers, ages 1-4 years, accounted for 9 deaths. There were no deaths at the hands of a parent or caretaker between the ages of 5-17 years. Blunt force trauma accounted for 13 deaths, asphyxia for 1, and hyperthermia, where 1 infant was left in a hot vehicle, for the last.

Other Homicides

Other homicides, in which the parent or caregiver was not a suspect or perpetrator, comprised 23 of the 38 total 2014 child homicides. Teenagers between the ages of 15 and 17 years accounted for 15 of the homicides. This age group included 12 firearm deaths, 1 stabbing death, 1 asphyxial death, and 1 death that occurred due to fire. Eight firearm deaths were occurred in the 1-14 year age groups. Black children comprised the majority of homicides, 17 deaths; 5 deaths were white children, and 1 was of an unknown race.

SUICIDES

Suicide was the manner of death of 48 children in 2014 (3.6% of all child deaths). The majority of children that committed suicide were between the ages of 15 and 17 years, accounting for 34 deaths (71%). There were 14 children between the ages of 10 and 14 years (29%). Males accounted for 32 deaths, females for 16 deaths. The means of death in suicides included asphyxia due to hanging in 23 of the deaths, use of a firearm in 24 of the deaths, and 1 death was due to a prescription drug overdose.

ACCIDENTS

Each year, accidental deaths comprise the largest number of non-natural deaths of children in North Carolina. In 2014, there were 195 deaths investigated by the NC Medical Examiner System certified as manner “accident.” The CFPT utilizes multiple categories to better analyze the circumstances of these deaths.

Motor Vehicle-related

In 2014, there were 94 deaths involving motor vehicles. A majority of these deaths, 50, were passengers, while 20 of these deaths were drivers. Three of the teen drivers had ethanol concentrations of .05, .11, and .21 mg/dL. Ten of the passengers that were killed were being driven by teen drivers. Of the 20 drivers, 11 were 17 years old, 8 were 16 years old and 1 was 15 years old. Eleven children were either not wearing seat belts or were not properly restrained. Other vehicle related collisions include 1 moped, 1 go-cart, 1 bicycle, 2 boats, and 18 pedestrians. Pedestrians included 6 children ages 1-4, 3 children ages 5-9, 4 children ages 10-14, and 5 children ages 15-17 years. There was 1 “other” death in which a child was electrocuted subsequent to being involved in a motor vehicle accident.

Asphyxia

Accidental asphyxiation caused the deaths of 25 children in 2014. Infants constituted the majority of deaths due to accidental asphyxiation in a sleep environment, either during co-sleeping or by being placed in an unsafe sleep environment (i.e., loose bedding, stuffed animals). Seven accidental asphyxial deaths of children between the ages of 3 months and 4 years included deaths from choking due to a food bolus or a foreign object obstructing the airway.

Fire/Burns/Carbon Monoxide

There were 11 fires that resulted in 14 child fatalities from thermal burns and/or carbon monoxide inhalation toxicity. All of the fatal fires were residential. Additionally, a one-year-old child sustained chemical burns from coming into direct contact with bleach.

Drowning

Drowning resulted in the deaths of 29 children in 2014. Two children died while unsupervised in the bath tub. Twelve drowning deaths occurred in bodies of fresh water or sea water. Ten deaths occurred in a private residential pool while 2 took place at apartment pools where there were no lifeguards. There was 1 teen drowning death for which the location was not specified. One toddler drowned when she fell into a septic tank, and another drowned after falling into a bucket of liquid soap.

Toxins

There were 5 deaths from toxic substances (i.e. poisoning). Three of these children were 17 years old and overdosed on ethanol, illicit drugs, or misuse of prescription medication. One child was 12 years old and overdosed on a prescription medication not prescribed to her. A toddler died as a result of ingesting a prescription medication by an undetermined means.

Firearms

There were 4 firearm injury deaths that were determined to be accidental. Two of the firearms were improperly stored and small children accessed them. One of the guns discharged while placed between two seats in a truck, and one of the guns fired when the handler, an adult, accidentally pulled the trigger.

SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME

There were 27 infants who died from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in 2014. The majority of infants, 17, were white, 8 were black, and 2 were Native American. Eleven SIDS deaths occurred in cribs, followed by 8 sleeping in adult beds, 6 in bassinets, and a 1 in a car seat. The sleep environment for one infant was unknown.