



**COUNTY OF COLLIN  
STATE OF TEXAS  
OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER  
FY2021**

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## **OUR MISSION**

To uphold Article 49.25 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure.

This includes establishment of a competent cause and manner of death for all reported cases to the office. The Medical Examiner is also tasked with the issuance of cremation permits, facilitating organ and tissue procurement, as well as meeting the needs of families, law enforcement, the District Attorney, Office of Emergency Management, medical and legal communities and funeral directors.

## **HISTORY**

The Collin County Medical examiner's Office was created in 1986 and opened on January 1, 1987. Under the requests and orders of the Commissioners Court, William B. Rohr M.D. was appointed as the County Medical Examiner who retains this position to this day. The Office has full accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners. Part-time Assistant Medical Examiner Lynn A. Salzberger M.D. retired on September 30, 2016. Stephanie S. Burton, M.D. was added as the first full-time Assistant Medical Examiner on October 1, 2016. Converting the part-time position to full-time status enabled Dr. Rohr to maintain a personal workload acceptable for accreditation in a cost-effective manner. The office operated on an annual budget of \$2,320,463 FY 2021. Growing population and the establishment of trauma centers in Collin County continues to increase the caseload handled by this office in terms of pathology, toxicology, investigation, evidence, property storage and disposal, transportation of bodies and courtroom testimony. These trauma centers receive cases from all over north Texas, east Texas west Texas and south Oklahoma. Once pronounced dead in these trauma centers, the case comes under the jurisdiction of the Collin County Medical Examiner.

Adult and Child Fatality Review Teams continue to be active. Both are chaired by Dr. Rohr.

Five-year on-site inspection of the Office by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) took place in July 1, 2021. The Office was inspected by Kimberly Molina MD, Chief Medical Examiner for the Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office. Full Accreditation was maintained. Only

two deficiencies in a lengthy checklist were noted: 89% of examination reports were completed within 60 days. NAME standards are 90% within 60 days. This deficiency reflected the combined work load of two physicians. The other deficiency concerned failure to publish in the Annual Report a list of cases, death age from live birth to one year of age, reviewed by the Child Fatality Review Team. This will now be included beginning with this FY2021 Annual Report. Full accreditation is again expected to be maintained in April 2022.

Information presented in this annual report has been compiled on the deaths reported to the Collin County Medical Examiner's Office during FY 2021. It is meant to reflect workload and Office activity, especially with respect to the pandemic.

The statistics for FY2021 continue to reflect a trend in how workload has been handled over the last few years. A higher percentage of only record review to establish cause and manner of death, without physical examination of the deceased in the office, are being performed for all death certified. The decision to bring cases into the office has become more of a negotiation between law enforcement and the family. This modified decision making is based on two issues. First and most importantly, morgue space has become a concern with our ever growing population. This situation was addressed by acquisition with grant funding of a portable morgue kept near the loading dock area. This has increased capacity for body storage. Second, concerns by human resources and administration about overtime and potential additional personnel, has driven the office to perform fewer scene visits and bring in fewer cases. Doing more by record review only is becoming more prevalent across the United States, not just Collin County.

An autopsy assistant was finally hired as a full-time county employee. Employment began August 2019. A second position was added FY2020. Individuals holding these positions were trained on the job. Both examiners utilize the assistants to the fullest extent possible. County full-time assistants now provide coverage 365 days per year. Their duties and responsibilities have expanded during FY2021 and shall to continue to expand in FY2022.

The on-line cremation permit and funeral home fee collection for permits was instituted January 2019. This software was developed by the county. It has been a success. Funeral homes adapted this process immediately, no money passes through the office and permits are issued

quicker. The cremation rate is increasing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The introduction of this software was timely. At this time, operating without it would be extremely difficult.

The case management system was introduced into the Office on January 1, 2017. Office personnel responded with great acceptance. It has streamlined many office practices and helped everyone with organization of their work; it continues to do such throughout FY 2021. As software usually is, one continues to explore its capabilities. This certainly remains true for the case management system as the Office continues to find new uses for it. It continues to undergo modifications. It remains a work in progress. Statistics for this report were compiled from the case management system and in-house spreadsheets.

The portable morgue now parked in the driveway of the loading dock area has been an important addition to the office. This was placed in service during the fall of 2019. It is being used for overflow during times of surge. It will serve as a storage area if a mass fatality strikes the community. With its rack system providing a capacity of 24, the total capacity of the facility is boosted to 39. A constant refrigerated temperature is maintained at all times. It continues to be in use and parked in the driveway.

COVID-19 has remained a particular burden on the office. A COVID screen of 13 questions is still performed for each case brought into the office, all done by the Field Agents, continues to be used. Mr. Bilyeu and the County Health Unit arranged for the installment of an ABBOTT ID NOW nucleic acid isothermal amplification laboratory instrument to test all cases for COVID-19 positivity. It arrived July 2020. This testing is done by the pathologists and autopsy technicians. It continues to be used and its reliability has continued. Its use after the pandemic could be expanded upon and is a goal of the office for FY2022.

Universal precautions are and have been used for all examinations. The low pressure room remained in use for examination of COVID-19 positive cases.

How has the pandemic affected the number of cases reported? The answer is: significantly. Looking at statistics contained elsewhere in this report, the cases reported (not brought in for examination) increased, in fiscal year, by 262 in 2017, 292 in 2018, 18 in 2019, 694 in 2020 and 406 in

2021. Most of this increase in 2020 and 2021 was due to deaths declared to be the result of COVID-19 infection. Another way of looking at this is by total deaths occurring in the county per calendar year. These numbers are easily obtainable for physicians through the state of Texas (TxEVER) death statistics via the internet. For Collin County the total number of deaths (all deaths in Collin County, including those that were not reported) per calendar year have increased in this fashion:

2015 up 363 to 4769  
2016 up 231 to 5000  
2017 up 310 to 5310  
2018 up 402 to 5712  
2019 up 319 to 5931  
2020 up 1172 to 7103  
2021 up 670 to 7773

Obviously, COVID-19 is responsible for this large increases beginning in 2020, continuing into 2021. For 2020 this office had 702 COVID-19 deaths reported, in 2021 799 were reported. This is a higher number than that reported by Collin County Epidemiology. Why? Because Medical Examiner numbers are calculated to include all of those individuals brought into Collin County for a higher level of care who then died at one of the county's acute care hospitals. Epidemiology does not count these individuals as Collin County deaths to avoid counting deaths twice. These additional cases were infection contracted outside of Collin County. This is standard public health/epidemiology practice.

Of note is the number of suicides in Collin County during the pandemic. There has been no suicide increase during the pandemic. FY 2019 had 118 deaths certified as suicide. FY 2020 had 112 deaths certified as suicide and FY 2021 117. These are Collin County numbers only and do not include those brought to a Collin County trauma center after the incident occurred out of county.

To understand just what these charts and graphs represent a glossary is included:

**DEATH REPORT:** Any reported death. This could also be referred to as an **INQUEST** as defined by the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure.

**NO CASE:** A reported death in which the attending physician is

allowed to sign the death certificate. The death must meet four criteria.

1. Death in the presence of a good witness.
2. There is a physician able and willing to sign the death certificate.
3. Death not under confinement by law enforcement or a mental health institution.
4. Death unrelated to any possible trauma.

**CASE:** A death not meeting all of the above four criteria and requiring an examination by the medical examiner. The medical examiner always signs the death certificate.

**ABSENTIA (IN ABSENTIA):** A death not meeting all four of the above criteria but not undergoing an examination by the medical examiner. The medical examiner always signs the death certificate.

**EXAMINED:** Another term for case. There are two types of examination by the medical examiner. **INSPECTION** in which the body is only examined externally. **AUTOPSY** in which there is an external and internal examination of the body. Body fluids are obtained externally for further testing in either type of examination.

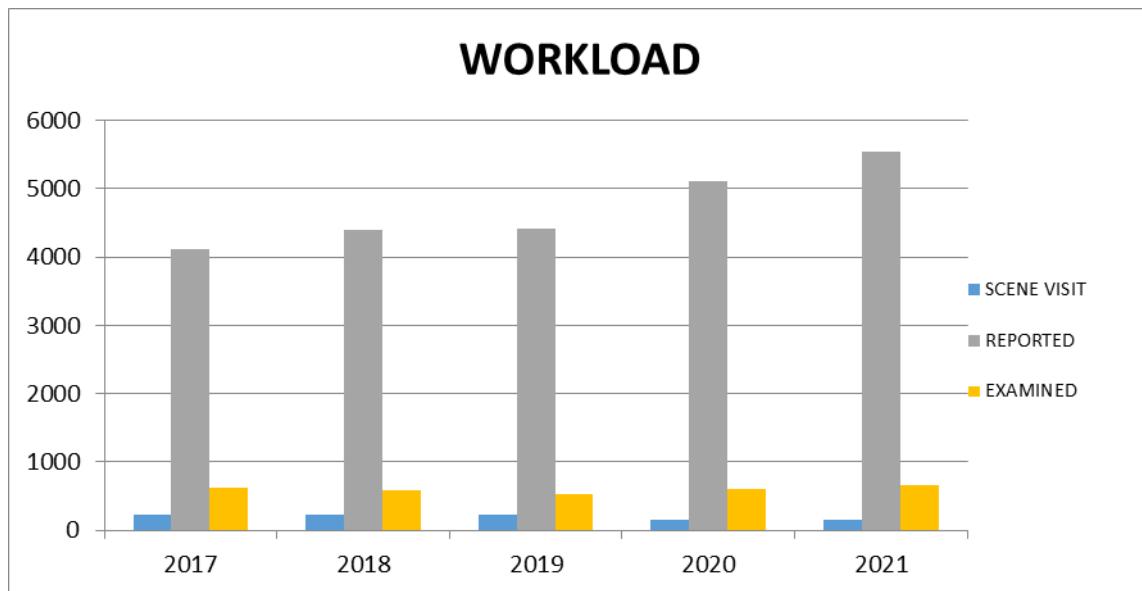
**SCENE:** The field agent travels to the scene of death to gather further information for the medical examiner and to assist law enforcement with their investigation. A medical examiner attends in select cases.

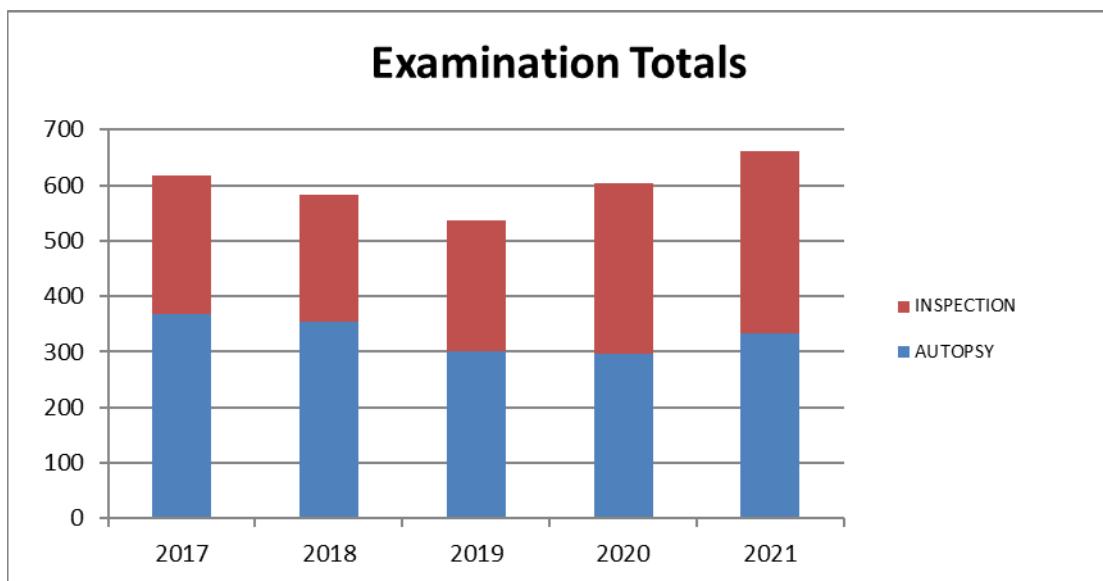
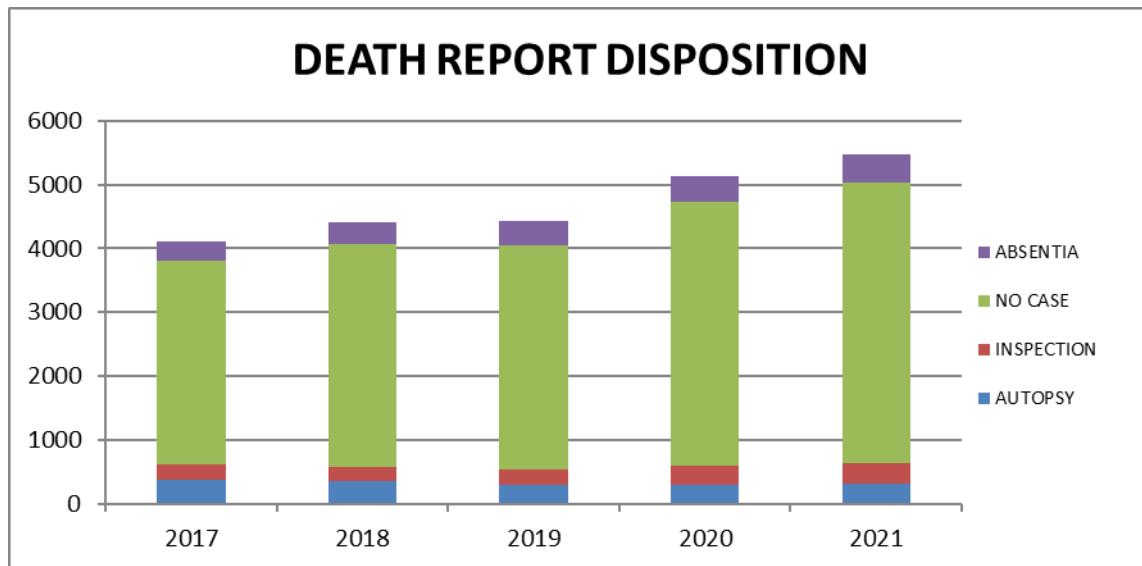
**CREMATION PERMIT:** A certificate issued by the medical examiner allowing a cremation to go forward. The certificate is required by the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure. Authorization for the cremation always comes from the family. A short informal investigation is always undertaken by the Office before the certificate (permit) is signed. A few requests require a more significant investigation including full autopsy. There is a fee of \$25 charged for every permit issued. For FY 2019 a system was instituted to collect these fees electronically.

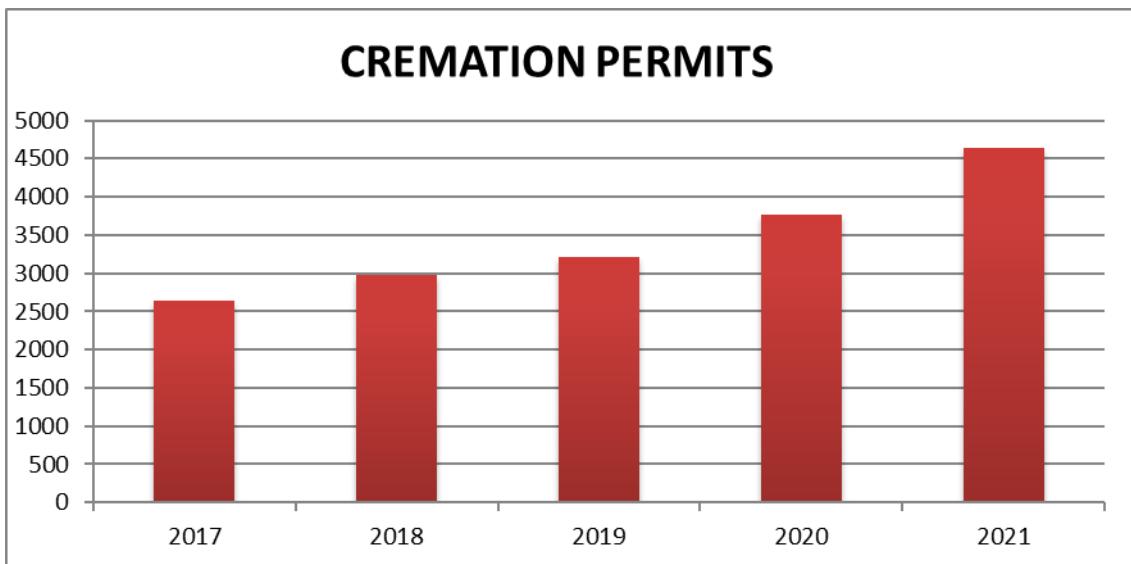
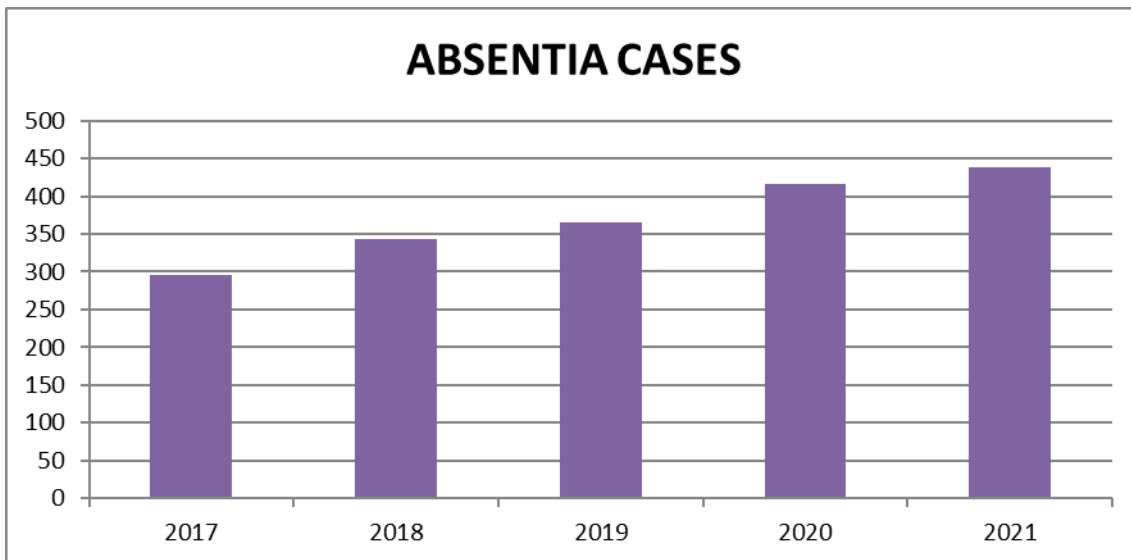
**MANNER OF DEATH:** This is the fashion about which death occurred. The medical examiner is required to make this determination for each death reported to the Office. There are several choices for manner of death. **NATURAL** is a death completely unrelated to trauma. **ACCIDENT** is when a death is in any way related to trauma. **SUICIDE** is a special type of traumatic death in which one dies at their own hand. **HOMICIDE** is a special type of

traumatic death in which one dies at the hand of another. UNDETERMINED is when the medical examiner lacks sufficient information to make one of the above four determinations.

For the following charts and graphs years are fiscal years, not calendar years.

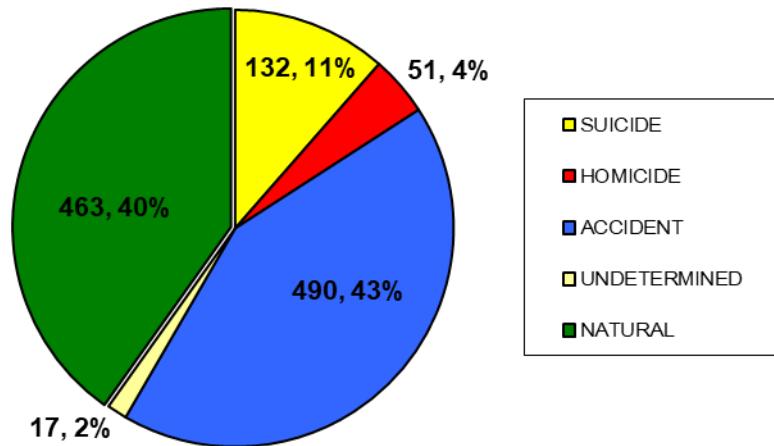






Homicide examinations generally create the most work. Natural deaths generally create the least amount of work. Homicides are almost always autopsied. The manner of death least likely to result in an autopsy is natural.

## Certification by the Collin County Medical Examiner - FY2021



**Y2017 through FY2021**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
SUICIDE	135	119	145	125	132
HOMICIDE	38	25	19	21	51
UNDETERMINED	26	26	35	36	17
CREMATIONS	2632	2969	3211	3763	4647
ABSENTIA	297	344	366	417	502
SCENE VISIT	222	232	220	163	148
REPORTED	4110	4402	4420	5114	5520
EXAMINED	617	582	537	604	661
ACCIDENT EXAMINED	185	177	87	108	210
NON-TRAUMA EXAMINED	219	230	246	316	463
AUTOPSY	369	355	286	296	313
INSPECTION	248	227	236	308	326
NO CASE	3196	3477	3517	4116	4403

## **ADULT FATALITY REVIEW TEAM FOR FY 2021**

The Adult Fatality Review Team meets on the last Friday of every month at the Collin County Medical Examiner's Office. The team members are:

Dr. William Rohr – Chief Medical Examiner (Collin County)

Dr. Stephanie Burton - Deputy Medical Examiner (Collin County)

Sue Schultz, LPC, LMFT – Collin County CFRT Coordinator

Sabina Stern – CFRT Member

Jawaid Asghar MBBS, MHA- Epidemiologist - Collin County Healthcare

Representatives from the following organizations also in attendance:

Texas Health Resources of Plano

Plano Police Department

U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency

Collin County Substance Abuse

Allen Fire Department

The purpose of the Collin County Adult Fatality Review Team is to review all deaths of adults in Collin County from a public health perspective and to enhance the skills of those investigating death in Collin County, especially the Medical Examiner, Epidemiology, Substance Abuse, and Mental Health.

The interaction that takes place among these agencies during the Review Team meetings gives insight to everyone involved and helps them to understand why these deaths take place with a focus on prevention.

## **CHILD FATALITY REVIEW TEAM FOR FY 2021**

The Child Fatality Review Team meets the first Friday of every month at the Collin County Medical Examiner's Office. The team members are:

Dr. William Rohr – Chief Medical Examiner (Collin County)

Dr. Stephanie Burton - Deputy Medical Examiner (Collin County)

Sue Schultz, LPC, LMFT – Collin County CFRT Coordinator

Sabina Stern – CFRT Member

Jawaid Asghar MBBS, MHA- Epidemiologist - Collin County Healthcare

Dr. Jessica Williams - ED Physician

Dr. Kristen N. Reeder, Reach Program

Representatives from the following organizations also in attendance:

Collin County District Attorney's Office

Collin County Child Protective Services

Collin County Advocacy Center

Plano Fire Department

Plano Police Department

Allen Police Department

Allen Fire Department

McKinney Police Department

McKinney Fire Department

Frisco Police Department

Medical Center of Plano

Presbyterian Health Hospital of Plano

Texas Health Resources of Plano

The purpose of the Collin County Child Fatality Review Team is to review all deaths of children in Collin County from a public health perspective and to enhance the skills of those investigating death in Collin County, especially the Medical Examiner, law enforcement and Child Protective Services. The interaction that takes place among these agencies during the Review Team meetings gives insight to everyone involved and helps them to understand why these deaths take place with a focus on prevention.

For FY 2021 we autopsied and signed the death certificate for 8 infant deaths (live birth to one year of age).

Of these (Manner/Cause of Death):

2 were Natural/SUID

1 was Undetermined/SUID

1 was Natural/Unexplained

1 was Accident/Maternal methamphetamine use

1 was Undetermined/Undetermined

1 was Accident/Extreme prematurity due to acute chorioamnionitis

1 was Accident/Asphyxia