



HOWARD COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

Dr. Steven J. Seele, Coroner

**120 E. Mulberry St. Room 104
Kokomo, IN 46901**

steven.seele@howardcountyin.gov

Phone: 765-456-1186

Fax: 765-456-2041

PRESS RELEASE

2017 First Quarter Statistics

For Immediate Release

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To: All Media Outlets

From: Dr. Steven J. Seele

As a public service to the citizens of Howard County, I will be issuing quarterly statistical reports pertaining to the operation of my office. This is the first of these reports.

The Howard County Health Department-Vital Records Division recorded 275 deaths in Howard County through the first quarter of 2017 which ended March 31st. Of those deaths, 51 were investigated by the Howard County Coroner's Office. There were 28 natural deaths, 0 homicides, 5 suicides, 1 undetermined, and 16 accidental deaths. Of the 16 accidental deaths, there were 14 drug overdoses with 11 being opiate related, 9 of which involved heroin. Fentanyl was detected in 5 of the cases.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fentanyl is a synthetic opiate that is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. Frequently, drug users do not know the heroin they are using is laced with fentanyl. Therefore, when injecting their usual amount, they end up taking a lethal dose. Heroin and fentanyl can look identical. Drug dealers include fentanyl in the heroin to increase the potency. However, their measuring equipment is often inaccurate and the fentanyl that is used is almost always produced by a clandestine lab and is of poor quality. The use of these illicit drugs is like playing Russian Roulette with a fully loaded gun.

Of the 51 cases investigated by the Howard County Coroner's office, there were 29 autopsies with 26 toxicology studies conducted at the cost of \$50,190.00 for the first quarter of 2017.

Dr. Steven J. Seele,

Howard County Coroner