

Canadian Coroner and Medical Examiner Database, 2006 to 2017

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From 2006 to 2017, 14% of deaths that occurred in Canada were investigated by a coroner or medical examiner (C/ME), an average of 32,628 investigations per year.

The role of the C/ME is to determine the circumstances surrounding the death and, in some cases, to conduct an inquest before determining the manner and cause of death. Deaths investigated by C/MEs are mainly, but not limited to, sudden and unexpected deaths due to trauma or drug use.

Territories have the highest percentage of deaths investigated

The percentage of C/ME-investigated deaths varied by year and from one jurisdiction to another. Some of the variation may be explained by the legislation mandating the types of death C/MEs investigate within their respective province or territory.

From 2006 to 2017, the territories had the highest percentage of deaths investigated by a C/ME. In the Northwest Territories, the percentage of investigated deaths declined from 45% in 2006 to 38% in 2017. The percentage remained stable in Yukon and was 26% in 2014, the most current year for which data are available.

Among the provinces, New Brunswick had the highest percentage of deaths investigated by C/MEs, though it declined from 27% in 2006 to 18% in 2016, the most current year for which data are available. In contrast, Quebec had the lowest percentage of deaths investigated by C/MEs (5% in 2017) and its rate has remained stable over the years.

Nearly two-thirds of deaths among 15 to 29 year olds are investigated

The proportion of C/ME-investigated deaths varied by age and sex. In 2017, the majority of deaths among persons aged 15 to 29 were investigated by C/MEs (64%), followed by children aged 5 to 14, where 53% of deaths were investigated. While 44% of deaths among adults aged 30 to 49 were investigated by C/MEs, less than 20% were investigated among those aged 50 and older. Deaths of children under the age of 5 were also less likely to be investigated (less than 20%). This distribution was similar across all provinces and territories, with the exception of British Columbia, which, in accordance with its legislation, has C/MEs investigate all child deaths.

Investigations by C/MEs more often involved male decedents than female. In 2017, 1.9 male deaths were investigated by C/MEs for every 1 female death. This can be explained by a greater frequency of males dying from accidents, suicides and homicides; these are all manners of death which require a C/ME investigation.

Half of investigated deaths are due to natural causes

C/MEs are required to categorize deaths according to the manner of death, also referred to as the means by which the death occurred. The five manners of death are: natural, accidental, suicide, homicide and undetermined. Information on manner of death in the Canadian Coroner and Medical Examiner Database is the most complete for the period from 2006 to 2014.

From 2006 to 2014, more than half of the investigated deaths were natural, followed by accidental (27%), suicides (11%) and homicides (2%). Undetermined causes accounted for 4% of deaths.



Natural deaths often occur in private residences

From 2006 to 2014, approximately half of natural deaths investigated by C/MEs occurred in a private residence, with the exception of Quebec and New Brunswick. In these two provinces, approximately 20% to 30% of natural deaths occurred in a private residence. In fact, the most common location of investigated natural deaths in Quebec (61%) and New Brunswick (80%) was health care facilities. In the other eight provinces/territories where data are available, this percentage varied from 24% to 46%.

More than half of accidental deaths involve falls or jumps, poisonings, or road vehicle accidents

From 2006 to 2014, the three main circumstances surrounding accidental deaths investigated by C/MEs were: falls or jumps (34%), poisonings (17%) and road vehicle accidents (15%).

Approximately 4 in 10 accidental deaths occurred in a private residence. The two other most common locations of accidental deaths were transport areas (16%) (road, railway track, train, subway, airport property, air or sea transport vehicle, bus station, airport terminal, ferry station, train station, jetty, wharf) and long term care facilities (10%).

The main circumstances of suicides involve violent methods and poisonings

Although the average age of people who died by suicide was similar for men (47 years) and women (46 years), the circumstances surrounding suicides varied by sex. From 2006 to 2014, violent methods (27%) and poisonings (15%) were the two main circumstances of suicides. Males most frequently used violent methods, while females were more likely to overdose on drugs or poisons, in all provinces/territories with the exception of British Columbia and Alberta. In these two provinces, poisonings was the method most frequently used by both sexes.

Approximately 7 in 10 suicides occurred in a private residence. Other common locations of suicides included: the countryside, public entertainment areas (public park, playground, public buildings, campground, restaurant, hotel, store) and transport areas. Each of these locations accounted for 4% to 5% of suicides.

Almost half of homicides involve firearms or sharp objects

From 2006 to 2014, firearms (25%) and sharp objects (22%) were the two most common circumstances surrounding deaths by homicide. Fights accounted for 10% of homicides across all provinces and territories.

Nearly 5 in 10 homicides investigated by C/MEs occurred in a private residence. Homicides were also more likely to occur in the countryside (13%), in public entertainment areas (10%) and in transport areas (8%).

Note to readers

The Canadian Coroner and Medical Examiner Database was developed at Statistics Canada in collaboration with the 13 provincial and territorial Chief Coroners and Chief Medical Examiners and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Currently, it combines data from all provincial and territorial databases, with the exception of Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador. Data for Nova Scotia and Nunavut were excluded from this report as counts are incomplete and do not reflect what is included in their respective jurisdictional databases. For the provinces and territories included in the report, the data are not available for all years. Data for Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec and the Northwest Territories are available from 2006 to 2017. Data for Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are available from 2006 to 2016. Data for Saskatchewan and Yukon are available from 2006 to 2014. Data for Alberta are available from 2006 to 2010. All data are considered preliminary and include only closed cases. See Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0386-01 Coroner and medical examiner investigated deaths and mortality rates, by age group, and Table 13-10-0387-01 Coroner and medical examiner investigated deaths and mortality rates, by sex.

Percentages may be lower in 2017 as a greater proportion of deaths are still under investigation (open cases).

Closed cases: Cases where the investigation and inquest are complete and manner of death final.

Open cases: Cases where the investigation and inquest are ongoing and manner of death preliminary.

Stillbirths are included in the calculation of the overall proportion of deaths investigated by a coroner or medical examiner (C/ME), but excluded from the calculation of statistics related to age, sex and manner of death.

The average number of deaths investigated by C/MEs per year is based on data available from 2006 to 2010, which is the period with maximal coverage (9 out of 13 provinces/territories).

Poisonings/poisons: Poisoning and acute drug toxicity by medication, drugs, gas and alcohol.

Countryside: Wooded area, forest, prairie, national or provincial park.

Transport area: Road, railway track, train, subway, airport property, air or sea transport vehicle, bus station, airport terminal, ferry station, train station, jetty, wharf, any other transport area not specified.

Public entertainment area: Local public park/playground, amusement parks, public or cultural building, campground, restaurant/bar, hotel/motel, stores/boutiques/places of business, other recreation areas/public buildings/entertainment areas/business areas specified.

Violent methods: Fight (physical), involving a firearm, sharp objects, blunt objects, strangulation, other specified violence or accidental exposure to mechanical force.

Information on circumstances surrounding deaths is not available for Saskatchewan and Quebec. For the other seven provinces where information on circumstances is available, the information is missing in some cases. Unknown circumstances accounts for 19% of accidental deaths, 38% of suicides and 27% of homicides.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5125](#).

Available tables: [13-10-0386-01](#) and [13-10-0387-01](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).