

Alcohol and Drugs

How often did suicide victims test positive for alcohol and/or drugs?

Thirty-eight percent (8) of the suicide victims tested positive for alcohol and/or drugs.

How often did homicide victims test positive for alcohol and/or drugs?

Fifty-three percent (21) tested positive for alcohol and/or drugs.

How often did assault victims test positive for alcohol and/or drugs?

Currently, there is no routine testing of assault victims for alcohol and/or drugs in the ED.

How often were non-illicit drugs detected in fatality victims?

There were 14 (22%) victims who tested positive for non-illicit drugs. There were 31 (48%) victims who tested positive for non-illicit drugs as well as illicit drugs.

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Presence of Alcohol and Drugs in Fatality Victims

Of the 64 deaths, 62 (97%) victims were tested for alcohol, with 24% (15) testing positive. Of those who tested positive for alcohol, 47% (7) had a blood alcohol level between 0.08% and 0.20%, and 27% (4) had a blood alcohol level over 0.20%.

Ninety-five percent (61) of the fatality victims were tested for cocaine, opiates, antidepressants, and amphetamines. Thirty-six percent (22) tested positive for one of these drugs. Of the victims who tested positive for drugs, 68% (15) were positive for cocaine, 27% (6) were positive for opiates, and 23% (5) were positive for amphetamines. The presence of two of these drugs was found in 36% (8) of these victims (Table 39). There were no fatalities who tested positive for more than two of these drugs. Table 39 also shows that overall, 48% (31) of the fatality victims tested positive for alcohol, or drugs, or both, and 53% (21) of homicide victims tested positive for alcohol, or drugs, or both.

Table 39: Presence of Drugs and Alcohol Levels in Firearm-related Fatalities, by Incident Intent:^a San Francisco, 1999

	Overall		Homicide		Suicide		Legal Intervention	
	N=64	%	n=40	%	n=21	%	n=3	%
Tested for alcohol	62	96.9	40	100.0	19	90.5	3	100.0
Positive for alcohol	15	24.2	9	22.5	4	21.1	2	66.7
Blood alcohol level								
< 0.08	4	26.7	2	22.2	0	--	2	100.0
0.08 – 0.20	7	46.7	5	55.6	2	50.0	0	--
> 0.20	4	26.7	2	22.2	2	50.0	0	--
Tested for drugs	61	95.3	40	100	18	85.7	3	100.0
Positive for drugs	22	36.1	15	37.5	5	27.8	2	66.7
Presence of cocaine or metabolites	15	68.2	13	86.7	1	20.0	1	50.0
Presence of opiates or metabolites	6	27.3	5	33.3	1	20.0	0	--
Presence of marijuana ^b	1	4.5	1	6.7	0	--	0	--
Presence of antidepressants	3	13.6	1	6.7	2	40.0	0	--
Presence of amphetamines	5	22.7	3	20.0	1	20.0	1	50.0
Presence of 2 of these drugs	8	36.4	7	46.7	0	--	0	--
Alcohol and the presence of these drugs	5	7.8	3	7.5	1	4.8	1	33.3
Alcohol or the presence of these drugs	26	40.6	18	45.0	7	33.3	2	66.7
Alcohol and/or drugs	31	48.4	21	52.5	8	38.1	3	100.0

^aData on drugs and alcohol are only available for fatalities. There is currently no routine testing on victims of nonfatal firearm injuries at San Francisco General Hospital Emergency Department.

^bTesting is not routinely conducted for the presence of marijuana.

Sixty-four percent (41) of the alcohol and drug specimens were collected within 24 hours of death, and 30% (19) were collected 24 hours or more following death—with delays ranging from 1 day and 10 minutes to 2 days and 15 hours (Table 40).

Of all samples that were collected within 24 hours, 63% (26) were drawn from victims who were pronounced dead at the scene.

Table 40: Presence of Alcohol and Drugs in Firearm-related Fatalities, by Time of Specimen Collection: San Francisco, 1999

	Overall		Specimen collected within 24 Hours of death		Specimen collected greater than 24 hours after death	
	N=64	%	n=41	%	n=19	%
Dead at scene	n=47	%	n=26	%	n=13	%
Positive for alcohol	9	19.1	3	11.5	3	23.1
Positive for drugs	16	34.0	11	42.3	4	30.8
Positive for alcohol and/or drugs	22	46.8	12	46.2	6	46.2
Admitted to SFGHED/hospital	n=17	%	n=15	%	n=6	%
Positive for alcohol	6	35.3	4	26.7	2	33.3
Positive for drugs	6	35.3	4	26.7	2	33.3
Positive for alcohol and/or drugs	10	58.8	7	46.7	2	33.3

Note: There was a single toxicological test with an unknown date and time, 2 of the tests were conducted within a day from the death and 1 test was conducted less than a day from death.

Of the 21 suicide victims with known specimen times, 11 (52%) toxicological specimens were obtained within the first 24 hours following death. Forty-eight percent (10) of the suicide samples were obtained greater than 24 hours following death—ranging from 1 day and 10 minutes to 1 day and 20 hours later. There were 2 unknown specimen times, but in each case it was documented that the sample was obtained within a day of death. Of samples taken from suicide victims greater than 24 hours following death with no medical intervention from an emergency department or hospital, 67% (6) tested positive for alcohol and/or drugs (Table 41).

Table 41: Time of Specimen Collection for Firearm-related Suicides: San Francisco, 1999

	Overall		Specimen Collected Within 24 Hours of Death		Specimen Collected Greater than 24 Hours of Death	
	N=21	%	n=11	%	n=10	%
Dead at scene	n=19	%	n=10	%	n=9	%
Positive for alcohol	4	21.1	1	10.0	3	33.3
Positive for drugs	5	26.3	2	20.0	3	33.3
Positive for alcohol and/or drugs	8	42.1	2	20.0	6	66.7
Admitted to SFGHED/hospital	n=2	%	n=1	%	n=1	%
Positive for alcohol	0	--	0	--	0	--
Positive for drugs	0	--	0	--	0	--
Positive for alcohol and/or drugs	0	--	0	--	0	--

Non-illicit Drugs

Table 42 identifies non-illicit drugs that were detected during autopsy, some of which were administered during medical intervention performed by either EMS or the SFGH ED. There were 14 (22%) fatality victims who tested positive for the non-illicit drugs that are identified in Table 43. Thirty-eight percent (24) of fatality victims tested positive for alcohol and/or non-illicit drugs, and 48% (31) tested positive for drugs (cocaine, opiates, antidepressants, and amphetamines) and/or non-illicit drugs (Table 43).

Table 42: Non-illicit Drugs^a Detected During Autopsy of Firearm-related Fatalities: San Francisco, 1999

	Overall n=26	ED, EMS, hospital yes n=10	No ED yes EMS n=13	No ED and no EMS n=3
Analgesic-narcotic				
Hydrocone	2	1	1	0
Propoxyphene	1	0	1	0
Norpropoxyphene	1	0	1	0
Analgesic-nonnarcotic				
Acetaminophen	1	0	1	0
Pentazocine	1	0	1	0
Cardiac drugs				
Lidocaine	5	5	0	0
Decongestants				
Norephedrine	2	1	1	0
Antihistamines				
Diphenhydramine	2	0	2	0
Chlorpheniramine	1	0	1	0
Bronchodilators				
Ephedrine	5	3	2	0
Anti-anxiety agents				
Diazepam	2	0	1	1
Nordiazepam	2	0	1	1
Miscellaneous				
Carbon monoxide	1	0	0	1

^a Non-illicit drugs are those drugs that are not cocaine, opiates, marijuana, antidepressants, or amphetamines, but are drugs that are normally prescribed or can be purchased over-the-counter.

Table 43: Presence of Non-illicit Drugs in Firearm-related Fatalities: San Francisco, 1999

	Overall		Homicide		Suicide		Legal Intervention	
	N=64	%	n=40	%	n=21	%	n=3	%
Presence of non-illicit drugs	14	21.9	10	25.0	3	14.3	1	33.3
Alcohol and non-illicit drugs	5	7.8	2	5.0	2	9.5	1	33.3
Alcohol or non-illicit drugs	19	29.7	15	37.5	3	14.3	1	33.3
Alcohol and/or non-illicit drugs	24	37.5	17	42.5	5	23.8	2	66.7
Drugs and non-illicit drugs	5	7.8	3	7.5	1	4.8	1	33.3
Drugs or non-illicit drugs	26	40.6	19	47.5	6	28.6	1	33.3
Drugs and/or non-illicit drugs	31	48.4	22	55.0	7	33.3	2	66.7

