

## MOVAC – Mercer County Excess Death Analysis

Date: August 10, 2024

MOVAC Contributor: Sean P. Keefe

Based on population numbers provided by [West Virginia Demographics](#), Mercer County ranks ninth in the state with 58,057 total residents. MOVAC has performed numerous detailed analyses on Wood County excess death. Via that analysis, we confirmed that 2021 saw the highest levels of death experienced in recent history. Based on that analysis and the publication of the 2021 vital statistics by the WV DHHR, we are finally able to provide an analysis of this excess death phenomenon for each county in West Virginia.

As you can see from the two tables below, Mercer County experienced a catastrophic rise in death in both 2020 and 2021. Much like the rest of the state, Mercer County reached unprecedented levels of total death in 2020 only to watch that death grow again in 2021 by more than any other year in our analysis:

Year	Total WV Death	Percent Change
2011	21,870	
2012	21,651	-1.00%
2013	21,846	0.90%
2014	22,164	1.46%
2015	22,643	2.16%
2016	22,721	0.34%
2017	23,290	2.50%
2018	23,462	0.74%
2019	23,291	-0.73%
<b>2020</b>	<b>26,108</b>	<b>12.09%</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>29,402</b>	<b>26.24%</b>

Year	Total Mercer County Death	Percent Change
2011	946	
2012	907	-4.12%
2013	914	0.77%
2014	900	-1.53%
2015	887	-1.44%
2016	846	-4.62%
2017	950	12.29%
2018	892	-6.11%
2019	880	-1.35%
<b>2020</b>	<b>1,042</b>	<b>18.41%</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>1,169</b>	<b>32.84%</b>

Data source - [https://dhhr.wv.gov/HSC/SS/Vital\\_Statistics/Pages/Vital\\_Statistics.aspx](https://dhhr.wv.gov/HSC/SS/Vital_Statistics/Pages/Vital_Statistics.aspx)

**Note – While each of the other years in the tables above are compared to the prior year, 2021 is compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019. It makes no sense to compare 2021 to an already pandemic-effected elevated death total in 2020.**

I know that we experienced a pandemic in 2020 and that excess death was to be expected. Are we now so callous toward the death of our neighbors that a 32.84% rise in death over the pre-pandemic total in 2019 is cause for a yawn rather than an in depth investigation? Shouldn't we understand in detail why our neighbors in Mercer County are dying at a higher rate than ever before?

The age-ranged tables that follow were created by compiling each year's age-ranged data provided on the "Age at Death by County of Residence" table in the appendix section of each year's [Vital Statistics Report published by DHHR from 2011 to 2020](#). The 2021 report no longer contains these detailed schedules. We contacted the DHHR for the 2021 details and were provided a spreadsheet containing the county level detail.

**Age Ranges of Concern**

The following are the tables for age ranges with the most alarming trends culminating in 2021. Please note, many of these deaths are occurring in our working age citizens. Shouldn't this be investigated by our elected officials?

**(\*)Note – For each of the age ranges below, the two highest years in regards to total death are identified by the bold boxes. The percent change column is comparing totals for each**

year to the prior year for years 2011 through 2020. For the 2021 percent change calculation, the next highest death total is identified and used as the comparison year.

Age Range 35-44		
Year	Total Death	Percent
2011	45	
2012	37	-17.78%
2013	26	-29.73%
2014	38	46.15%
2015	45	18.42%
2016	40	-11.11%
2017	28	-30.00%
2018	37	32.14%
2019	31	-16.22%
2020	42	35.48%
<b>2021 *</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>24.44%</b>

Age Range 45-54		
Year	Total Death	Percent
2011	83	
2012	71	-14.46%
2013	87	22.54%
2014	65	-25.29%
2015	71	9.23%
2016	67	-5.63%
2017	61	-8.96%
2018	57	-6.56%
2019	57	0.00%
2020	73	28.07%
<b>2021 *</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>17.24%</b>

A closer look at population changes in the 35-44 age range may be needed to fully understand what happened to this age group, but the 42 deaths in 2020 were a significant increase over the trend of the prior five years. Then in 2021, this age category saw a new record set with a 24.44% increase over the previous record tied in 2015. What in the world happened in Mercer County in 2021 where death in the 35-44 age range skyrocketed to this new record? Perhaps this is drug overdoses, accidents, or deaths of despair – whatever the cause, shouldn't there be a detailed analysis by those in charge of public health? Shouldn't this be a five-alarm fire for Mercer County Leadership? It can be difficult to draw any inference from such a small number, but a 24.44% increase, when we know other age ranges are also setting records, should be investigated.

For the 45-54 age range, 2020 saw a 28.07% rise for this working-age category in Mercer County. Then in 2021, death rose by enough to surpass the record year of 2013 by 17.24%. Again, this is the backbone of Mercer County's working-age population. Shouldn't we care enough to investigate these deaths thoroughly?

Age Range 55-64			Age Range 65-74			Age Range 75-84		
Year	Total Death	Percent Change	Year	Total Death	Percent Change	Year	Total Death	Percent Change
2011	133		2011	151		2011	221	
2012	144	8.27%	2012	164	8.61%	2012	216	-2.26%
2013	144	0.00%	2013	166	1.22%	2013	231	6.94%
2014	136	-5.56%	2014	186	12.05%	2014	202	-12.55%
2015	146	7.35%	2015	164	-11.83%	2015	201	-0.50%
2016	127	-13.01%	2016	177	7.93%	2016	188	-6.47%
2017	132	3.94%	2017	238	34.46%	2017	226	20.21%
2018	134	1.52%	2018	181	-23.95%	2018	220	-2.65%
2019	110	-17.91%	2019	202	11.60%	2019	246	11.82%
2020	141	28.18%	2020	234	15.84%	2020	246	0.00%
2021 *	182	24.66%	2021 *	265	11.34%	2021 *	266	8.13%

The 55-64, 65-74, and 75-84 age ranges all set records for total death in Mercer County in 2021. Why are we setting records for total death in 2021?

Is anyone in Mercer County curious about what happened in 2021 to create such alarming increases in death? Are these citizen’s lives not worthy of investigation?

If you are concerned about this rise in Mercer County death (as documented by your state), please consider sharing this information with state leaders responsible for representing your population.

**Delegates –**

- JOE ELLINGTON (R) – MERCER - [joe.ellington@wvhouse.gov](mailto:joe.ellington@wvhouse.gov)
- MARTY GEARHEART (R) – MERCER - [marty.gearheart@wvhouse.gov](mailto:marty.gearheart@wvhouse.gov)
- DOUG SMITH (R) – MERCER - [doug.smith@wvhouse.gov](mailto:doug.smith@wvhouse.gov)

**Senators –**

- CHANDLER SWOPE (R) – MERCER - [chandler.swope@wvsenate.gov](mailto:chandler.swope@wvsenate.gov)
- MARK R. MAYNARD (R) – WAYNE - [mark.maynard@wvsenate.gov](mailto:mark.maynard@wvsenate.gov)

**Please note** – After the election, your delegate or senator may change. After November 5, 2024, please refer to the new rosters as published on the legislature’s website –

- House Roster - <https://www.wvlegislature.gov/house/roster.cfm>
- Senate Roster - <https://www.wvlegislature.gov/Senate1/roster.cfm>