

Kentucky Department
for Public Health

Child Fatality Review 2025 Report

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Section 1: Executive Summary

This annual report was prepared and submitted in accordance with Kentucky Revised Statute 211.684. The 2025 report describes data on child deaths, or fatalities, occurring in the 2024 calendar year. When available, data for the years 2019-2023 have also been included to demonstrate trends and fluctuations in causes of child fatality.

There has been a slight decline in the overall number of child deaths between 2023-2024, as seen in Figure 1. The change in the number of child deaths over time is difficult to attribute to specific causative factors since the causes of death for Kentucky children can vary from year to year.

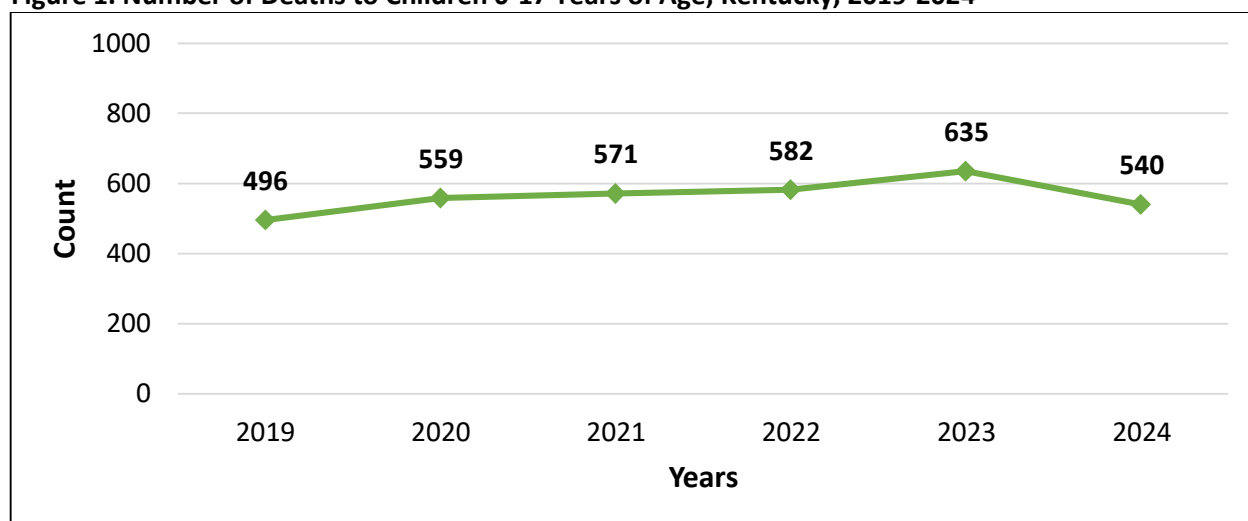
Section 2: Introduction

All data points included within this report, unless otherwise noted, are obtained from the Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records. For this report on child fatality in Kentucky, only records for children who were Kentucky residents at the time of death or Kentucky residents who died out of state were included. Where appropriate, causes of death are broken down by a child's age and will include infants (less than 365 days of age) and children (ages 1-17 years).

Causes of death for this report refer to the primary cause of death listed on the official death certificate. These causes of death are indicated by codes using the 10th revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases & Related Health Problems codes (commonly known as ICD-10 codes); these codes are assigned to each decedent by the National Vital Statistics System through the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics.

For this report, causes of death have been broken down into five overarching categories of the primary cause of death and the manner of death. Manner of death is contained within a death certificate and includes accident, natural, homicide, suicide, or undetermined/pending. These categories, based on federal categorizations through the National Center for Fatality Review & Prevention, are unintentional injuries, natural, homicide, suicide and undetermined deaths, which include sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). SUID occurs among infants who are less than one year old and have no immediately obvious cause of death. It includes three commonly reported types (SIDS, accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed and unknown causes).

Sub-categories will be included with each overarching category to draw attention to specific causes of death that affect larger proportions of the population or otherwise require attention. Not all causes of death are included as sub-categories in order to protect anonymity and families' privacy.

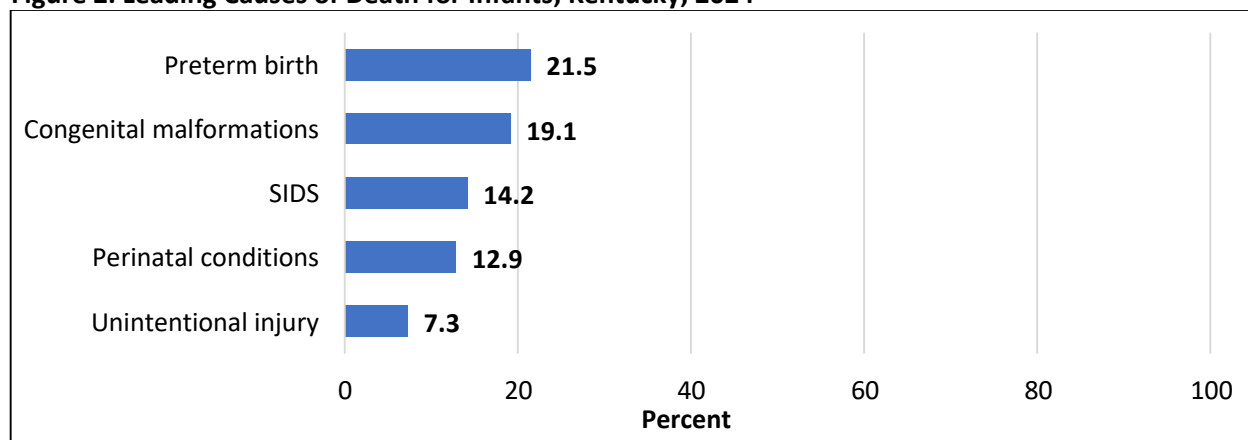
Figure 1. Number of Deaths to Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024

Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

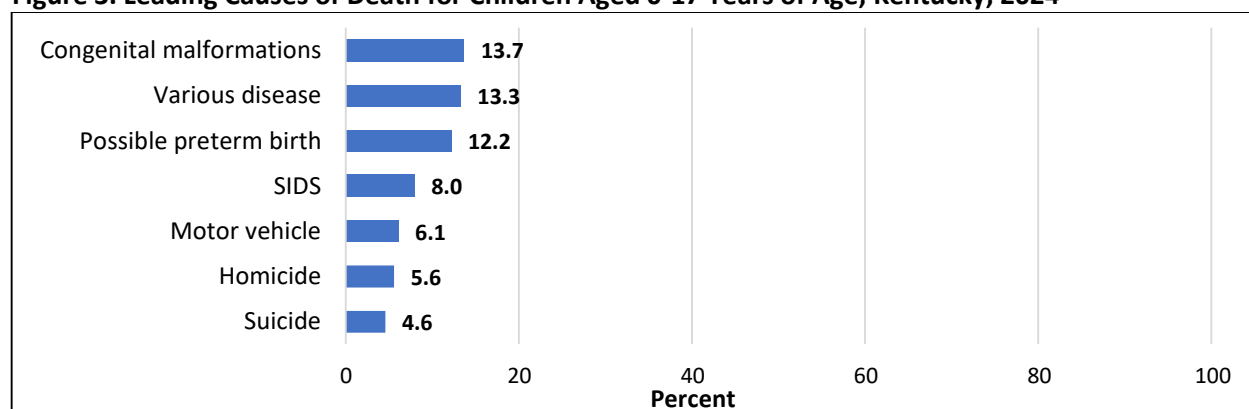
Table 1: Child Deaths by Age Ranges; Kentucky, 2019-2024

Age Range	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1-4 years old	58	47	51	90	80	68
5-9 years old	38	36	50	40	44	37
10-14 years old	59	70	56	62	60	58
15-17 years old	73	92	102	88	100	74
Total	228	245	259	280	284	237

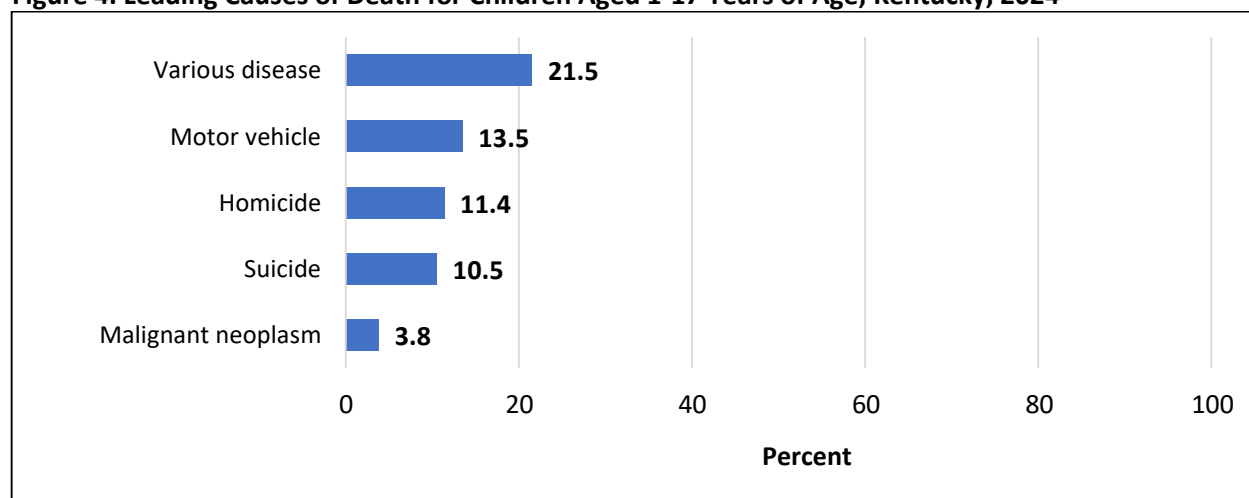
Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Figure 2. Leading Causes of Death for Infants; Kentucky, 2024

Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Figure 3. Leading Causes of Death for Children Aged 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2024

Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Figure 4. Leading Causes of Death for Children Aged 1-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2024

Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Section 3: Infant Mortality

Infant deaths account for a majority of all child deaths in Kentucky, as seen in Table 1. Infant mortality is widely recognized as an important indicator for assessing the overall health of a society (CDC, 2018). While infants do succumb to unintentional injuries and homicides, they are primarily affected by natural causes of death, such as preterm birth, congenital anomalies and perinatal conditions, as previously detailed within this report.

Infants account for **56%** of all deaths to Kentucky children for 2024.

Table 2: Infant Deaths; Kentucky, 2019-2024

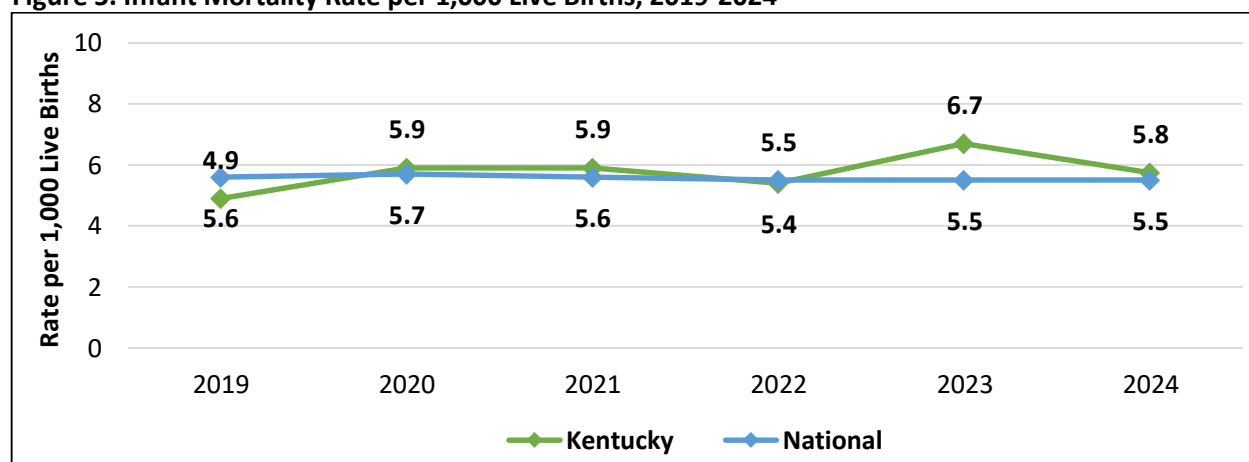
Age Range	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Infants (<365 days old)	268	314	312	302	351	303

Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

A common way to express infant deaths is by using a mortality rate. This approach considers population size and allows for comparison between other states, regions, and even other countries. An infant mortality rate includes any death of an infant in a given year, regardless of cause or manner of death, per 1,000 live births within the specific geographic region of interest. The United States consistently has one of the highest infant mortality rates among developed nations (CDC, 2025).

In 2022, Kentucky ranked 30th in infant mortality among all 50 US states, with 5.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births (America's Health Rankings, 2025). In 2024, the rate increased to 5.8 per 1,000 live births. Even though Kentucky's infant mortality rate has slightly increased over the last five years, there was an encouraging decrease between 2023 and 2024 as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Infant Mortality Rate per 1,000 Live Births, 2019-2024



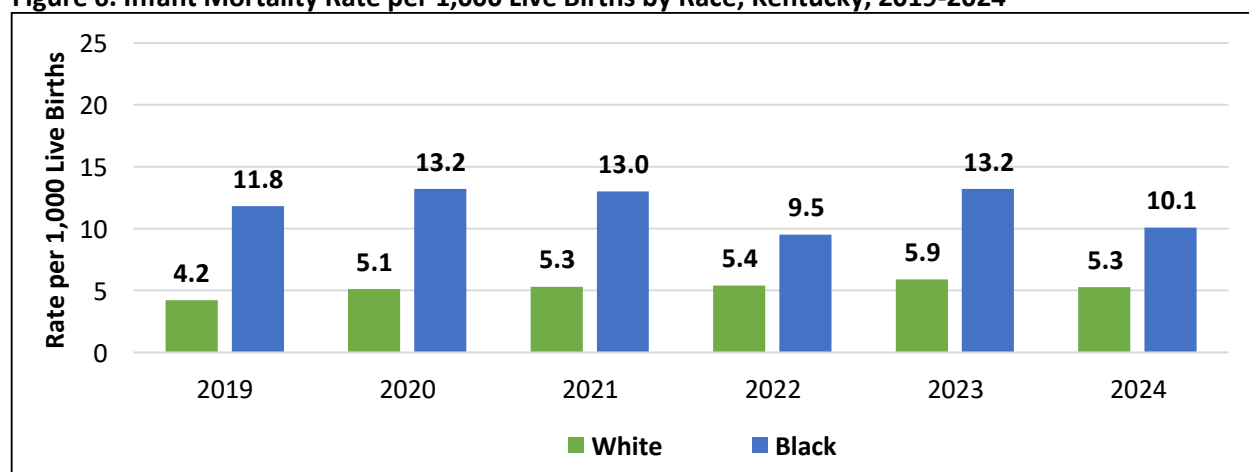
Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Live birth data obtained from Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics birth certificate records, 2019-2024

National data obtained from CDC, 2019-2024

Despite the encouraging decrease in the overall infant mortality within Kentucky, a consistent disparity persists when examining infant mortality among black and white populations. As demonstrated in Figure 6, Black infants in Kentucky die at close to double the rate of white infants in 2024.

Figure 6. Infant Mortality Rate per 1,000 Live Births by Race; Kentucky, 2019-2024



Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

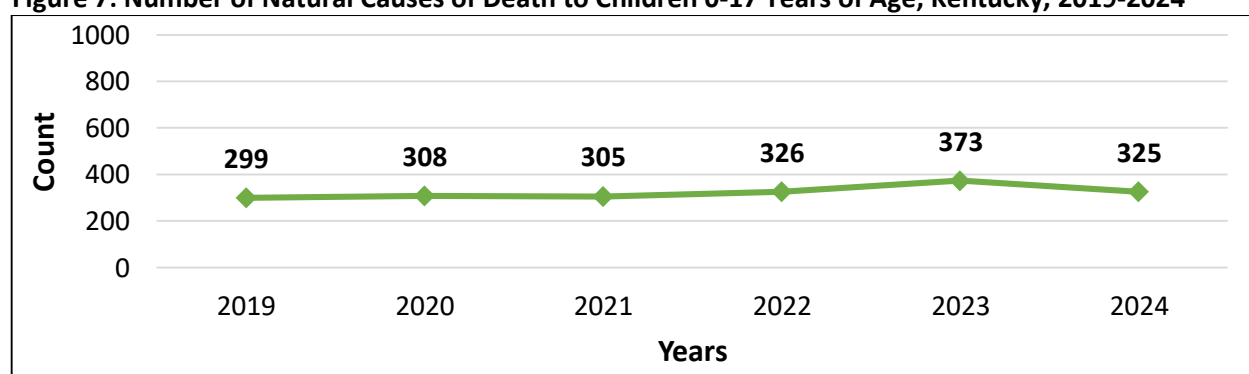
Live birth data obtained from Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics birth certificate records, 2019-2024

Section 4: Natural Deaths

This category includes deaths due to cancer, congenital anomalies (birth defects), preterm births, perinatal conditions and other health-related causes of death. A six-year trend of natural deaths is demonstrated in Figure 7. While some of these deaths could have been prevented, these deaths are considered natural rather than accidents or unintentional injuries, as determined by the assigned manner of death on the death certificate.

Natural causes of death account for **60%** of all child deaths regardless of age for 2024 in Kentucky.

Figure 7: Number of Natural Causes of Death to Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024

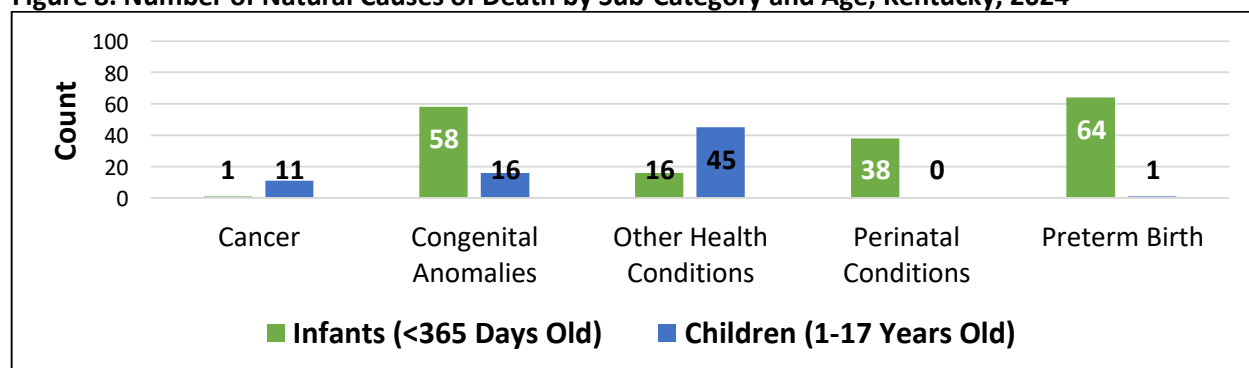


Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Preterm Birth

For preterm birth to be identified as a cause of death, the child must be born prior to 37 weeks of gestation, and the primary cause of death must be 1 of 70 specific ICD-10 codes. Preterm birth has been identified by the National Center for Fatality Review & Prevention as one of the greatest predictors of infant mortality (National Center for Fatality Review & Prevention, 2020). Figure 8 shows that preterm birth and perinatal condition deaths primarily affect infants, while other health conditions primarily affect children 1-17 years of age.

Figure 8. Number of Natural Causes of Death by Sub-Category and Age; Kentucky, 2024

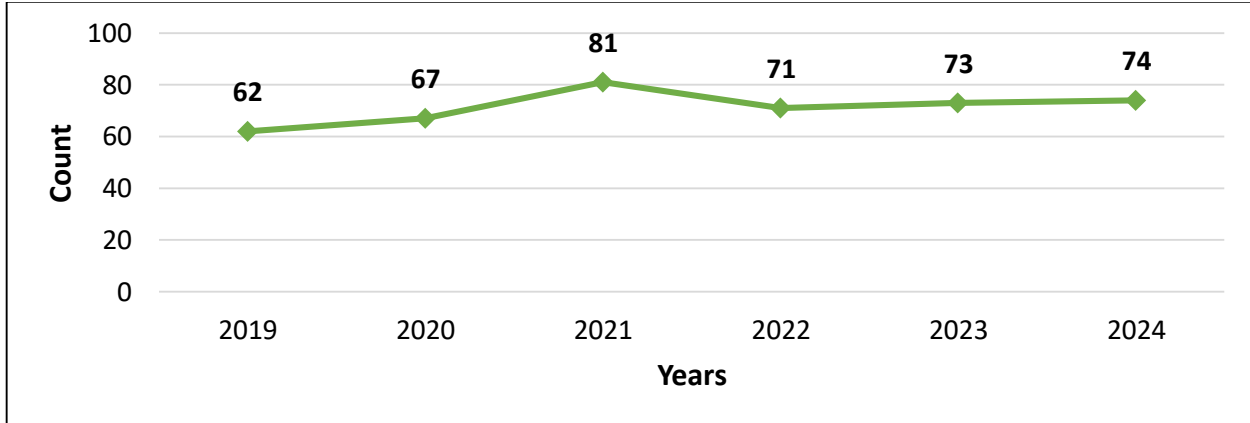


Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Congenital Anomalies

Congenital anomaly-related deaths are the second most common cause of death for infants in 2024, accounting for 19% of all infant deaths. Due to the complexity involved in diagnosing many congenital anomalies, it is not possible to provide an accurate and detailed breakdown of specific anomalies with death or birth certificate data alone. Death and birth certificate data do not make it clear whether or not a child received genetic testing, which is required for diagnosing several congenital anomalies. Figure 9 shows the number of deaths due to congenital anomalies for 2019-2024.

Figure 9. Number of Congenital Anomaly Deaths to Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024

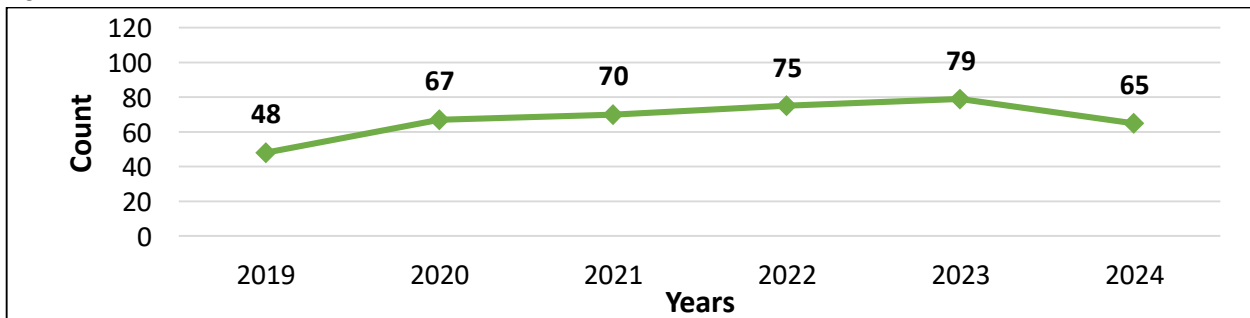


Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Section 5: Undetermined Deaths, SIDS and SUID

Undetermined, as a category of death, includes causes which are undetermined or ill-defined. A death can be categorized as undetermined because there is insufficient information on the death certificate or because the coroner and/or medical examiner was unable to determine a specific cause of death. Insufficient information usually occurs in cases where a Kentucky resident dies in another state. In these cases, the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics attempts to obtain death certificate information, but delays in reporting and communication barriers often result in deaths with no clear cause delineated on the death certificate. The five-year trend in undetermined deaths is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Number of Undetermined Causes of Death for Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024



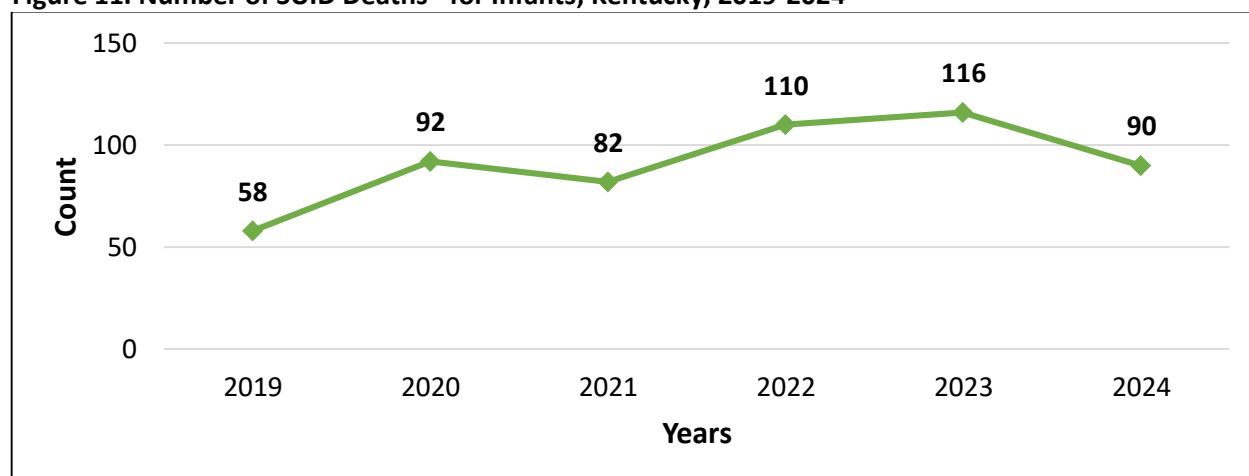
Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

SUID

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) uses SUID to describe the sudden and unexpected death of a baby less than 1 year old if the cause was not obvious before investigation. The three commonly reported types of SUID include the following: SIDS, unknown cause, and accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed.

In order for an infant to be considered a SUID case, their primary cause of death must be one of five ICD-10 codes (R95: SIDS, R99: undetermined, W75: accidental strangulation and suffocation in bed, W83: other specified threats to breathing or W84: unspecified threats to breathing). When potential infant deaths are identified, a multidisciplinary team reviews details surrounding the child's death and decides whether or not the death meets criteria to be considered a SUID. The cases of SUID over the past six years are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Number of SUID Deaths* for Infants; Kentucky, 2019-2024



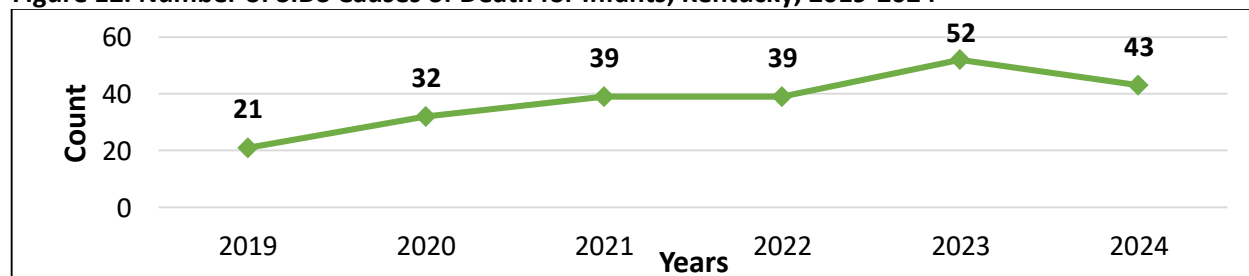
Data Source: Kentucky SUID Case Registry, 2019-2024

*Counts are mutually exclusive and cannot be compared to other causes of death in this report.

SIDS

SIDS as a primary cause of death is identified through a specific ICD-10 code (R95). SIDS is an exclusionary cause of death that can only be used for infant deaths where a clear cause of death cannot be identified. Figure 12 shows SIDS deaths for the years 2019 to 2024.

Figure 12. Number of SIDS Causes of Death for Infants; Kentucky, 2019-2024



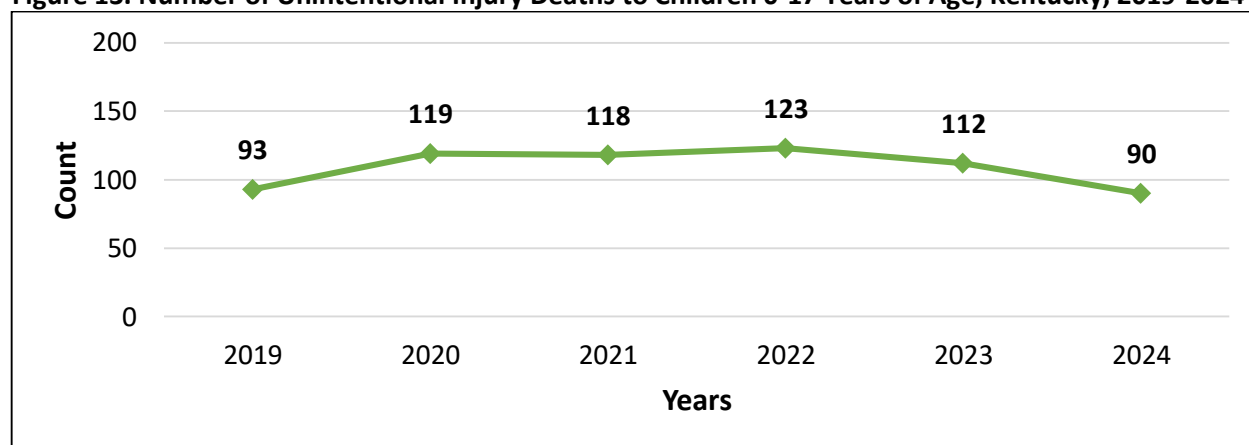
Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Section 6: Unintentional Injury Deaths

Figure 13 shows the number of unintentional injury deaths from 2019 to 2024. This category mainly consists of deaths where the manner is listed as “accident.” For that reason, these deaths do not include intentional causes (e.g., homicide or suicide) or deaths where the child died due to a health-related cause (e.g., congenital anomalies or cancer). Unintentional injuries are often the leading cause of death for children. Some of the preventable deaths include children who choked on food or toys, were left in a hot car (i.e., hyperthermia) and were accidentally shot with a firearm.

Infants account for **16%** of unintentional injury deaths to Kentucky children in 2024.

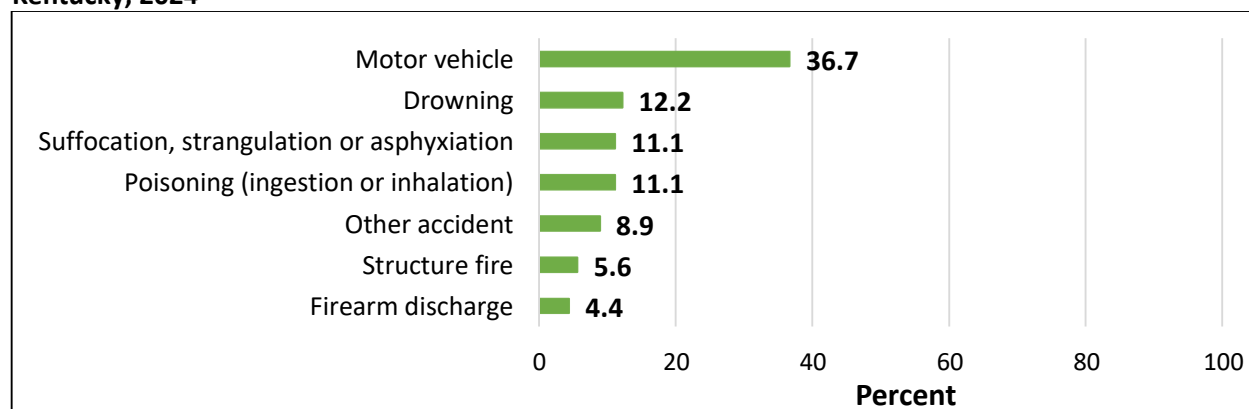
Figure 13. Number of Unintentional Injury Deaths to Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024



Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

The unintentional injury category contains the most variety of any cause of death within this report (see Figure 14) and accounts for 17% of all childhood deaths. There are several sub-categories with yearly variation.

Figure 14. Percent of Unintentional Injury Deaths by Sub-Category Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2024



Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

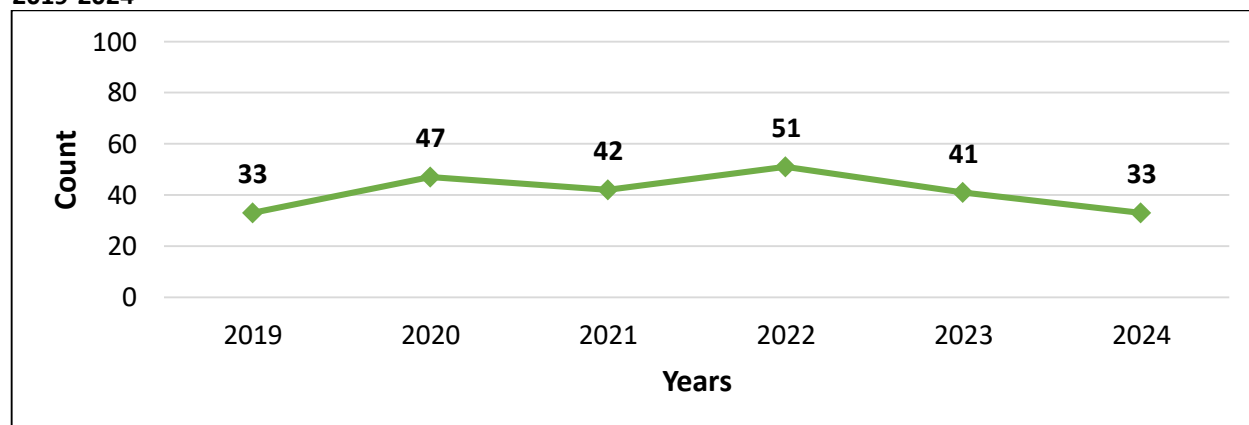
Motor Vehicle Accidents

Motor vehicle accidents include accidents where the deceased was either a pedestrian, passenger (unsecured or secured) or driver of a motor vehicle, motorcycle, train, pedal bike, watercraft, aircraft or all-terrain vehicle. Although pedal bikes are not motorized vehicles, when unintentional injury deaths involve a collision with some form of motorized vehicle and the decedent was a passenger of the pedal bike, the death is included in this sub-category.

Thirty-seven percent of unintentional injury deaths to Kentucky children are attributed to some form of motor vehicle accident.

The number of motor vehicle accident-related deaths in the past five years is shown in Figure 15. When a motor vehicle accident occurs, but the manner is either homicide or suicide, the child's death will be categorized as either homicide or suicide causes of death and not as an unintentional injury.

Figure 15: Number of Motor Vehicle Accident-Related Deaths to Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024



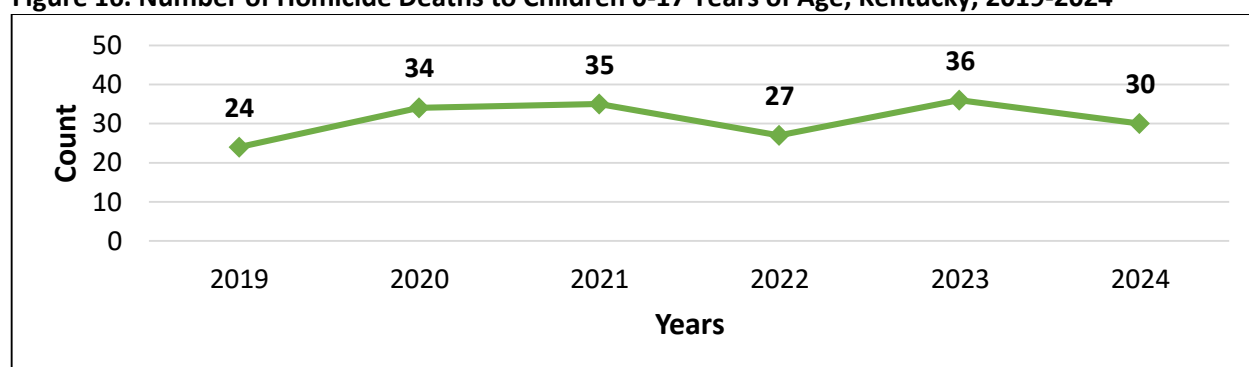
Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

The type of motor vehicle-related deaths can vary from year to year, but the most common type is consistently motor vehicle accidents where the child was either a passenger or driver of a motorized vehicle (including trucks or cars).

Section 7: Homicide Deaths

Homicide deaths, demonstrated within Figure 16, include any death where the manner is listed as homicide. This means the death occurred at the hands of another in such a way that cannot be categorized as an unintentional injury or accident. While many homicide deaths do end with criminal investigations, homicide as a manner of death is primarily a medical term and is not necessarily analogous with legal definitions of manslaughter or malice aforethought.

Ninety percent of homicide deaths in Kentucky in 2024 were to children between ages 1 and 17 years old.

Figure 16. Number of Homicide Deaths to Children 0-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024

Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Section 8: Abuse, Neglect and Maltreatment

Abuse, neglect and maltreatment deaths among Kentucky children are not represented within this report due to limitations in the data set. Such occurrences of child death are not clearly identified within death certificate records because of the complexities of the circumstances leading to the child's death and associated legal proceedings to identify responsible parties. For this reason, abuse and maltreatment deaths have been suppressed and are included with homicide deaths in the Figure 16.

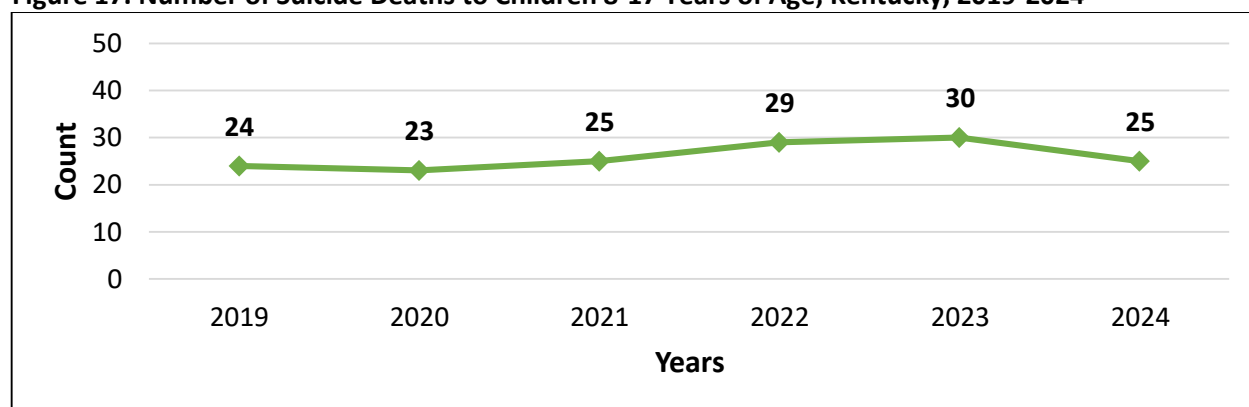
For an in-depth review of Kentucky's abuse, neglect and maltreatment-related child deaths, please see the Annual Report of Child Fatalities & Near Fatalities prepared by the Division of Protection & Permanency in conjunction with the Department for Community Based Services and the Cabinet for Health & Family Services: [Child Protection Branch - Cabinet for Health and Family Services](#).

Section 9: Suicide Deaths

This category of death is strictly for deaths in which the manner is listed as suicide. In cases where the child's intentions are not clear, at the discretion of the coroner or medical examiner, the manner of death would be listed as undetermined. For this report, such deaths would be categorized with unintentional injuries since intent could not be clearly identified. Figure 17 shows the number of suicide deaths from 2019 to 2024.

The age range for death by suicide for Kentucky children extends from 8 to 17 years for 2024.

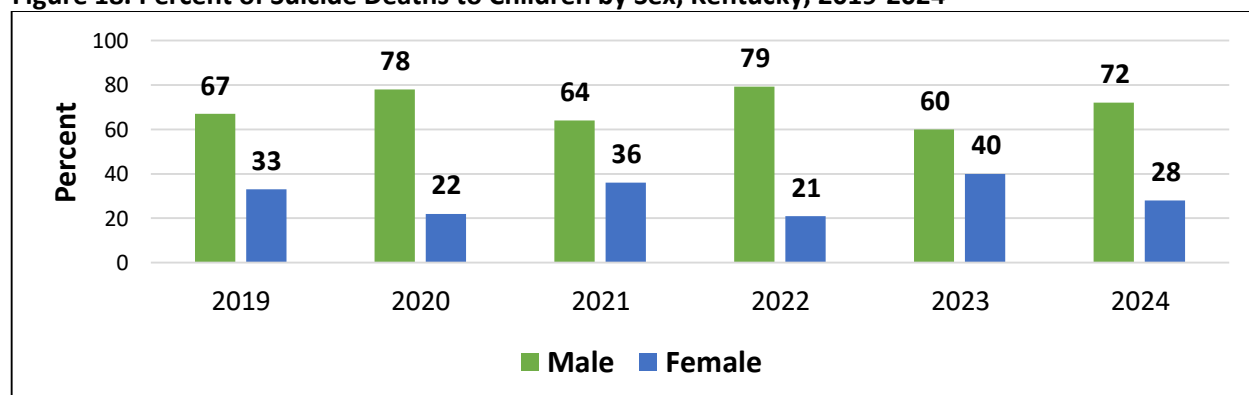
Figure 17. Number of Suicide Deaths to Children 8-17 Years of Age; Kentucky, 2019-2024



Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Males are much more likely to die by suicide than females, as demonstrated in Figure 18.

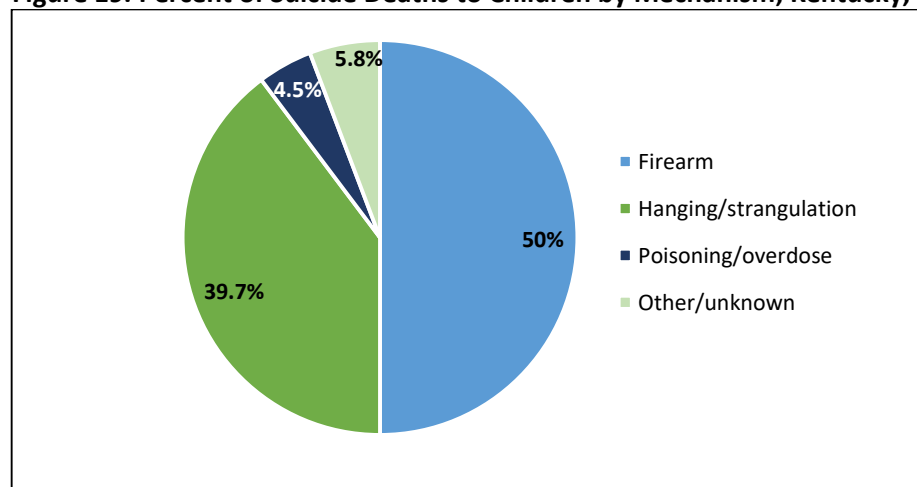
Figure 18. Percent of Suicide Deaths to Children by Sex; Kentucky, 2019-2024



Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

Firearms were the most common suicide mechanism from 2019 to 2024, as demonstrated in Figure 19.

Figure 19. Percent of Suicide Deaths to Children by Mechanism; Kentucky, 2019-2024



Data Source: Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Vital Statistics, death certificate records 2019-2024

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