

# Decade + of Child Deaths in Kentucky

**Kentucky Chapter**

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American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



**This information is prepared in conjunction with the Division of Maternal and Child Health within the Kentucky Department for Public Health. It is made possible by the many individuals who contributed their time and efforts towards preventing child fatalities.**

All data 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 have been included. This includes Kentucky residents who died out of state. Where appropriate, causes of death are broken down by the 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.

For this report, causes of death have been broken down into five categories which consider the primary cause of death and the manner of death. Manner of death is contained within the death certificate and includes accident, natural, homicide, suicide, undetermined, or pending. The overarching categories are based on federal categorizations through the National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention and include unintentional injuries, natural, homicide, suicide, and undetermined deaths such as sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). SUID occurs among infants less than 1 year old and have no immediately obvious cause of death and includes three commonly reported types (SIDS, accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed, and unknown causes).

In the US, almost 37,000 children die before their 18th birthday every year.

Child Fatality Review/Child Death Review is a prevention-oriented process that reviews the circumstances surrounding the death of a child with the goal of improving community health and safety.

- Includes a multidisciplinary team of experts including health care, social work, law enforcement, public health.
- Review aims to understand why the child died and better equip communities to prevent future fatalities.

Figure 1

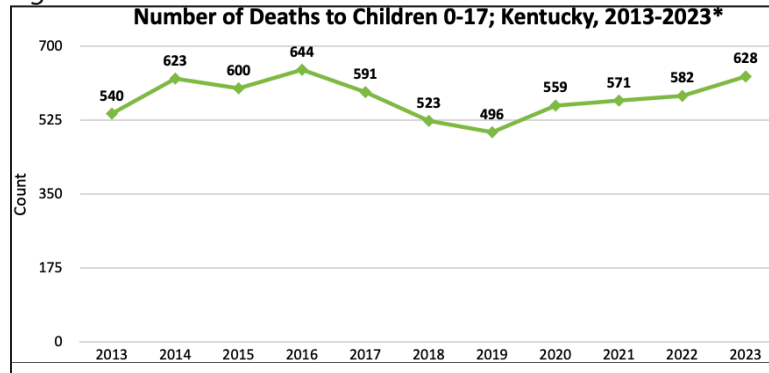


Table 1

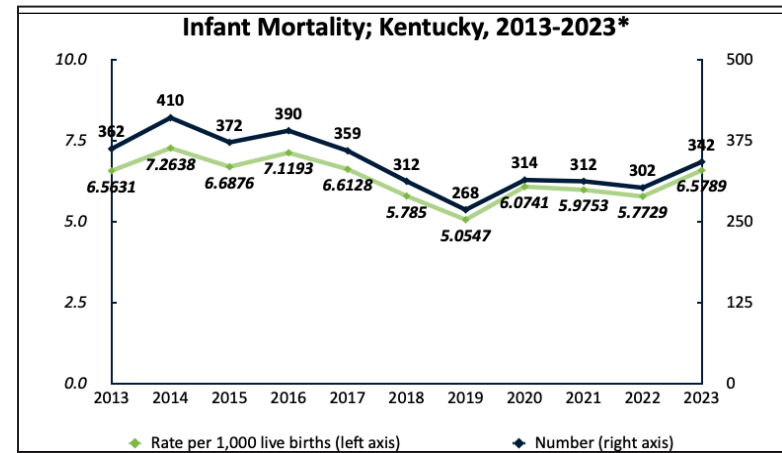
Total Deaths to Kentucky Children, by Age Range											
Age Range	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Infant	362	410	372	390	359	312	268	314	312	302	342
1-4 years old	60	53	69	69	51	61	58	47	51	90	83
5-9 years old	35	48	37	41	39	41	38	36	50	40	44
10-14 years old	48	47	56	58	52	36	59	70	56	62	60
15-17 years old	35	65	66	86	90	73	73	92	102	88	99
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>628</b>

## INFANT MORTALITY

Infant deaths account for a majority of all child deaths in Kentucky as seen in Table 1. Infant mortality is an important marker for overall health of a society. According to CDC, the five leading causes of infant deaths in 2021 were birth defects, preterm birth, sudden infant death syndrome, injuries (e.g. suffocation), and maternal pregnancy complications.

**Infants account for 67% of all child deaths in Kentucky over the 10 year period.**

Figure 2



Consistent disparity exists when considering infant mortality among black and white populations as demonstrated in Figure 3 with black infants in Kentucky dying at more than double the rate of white infants for the majority of years over the data period.

Figure 3

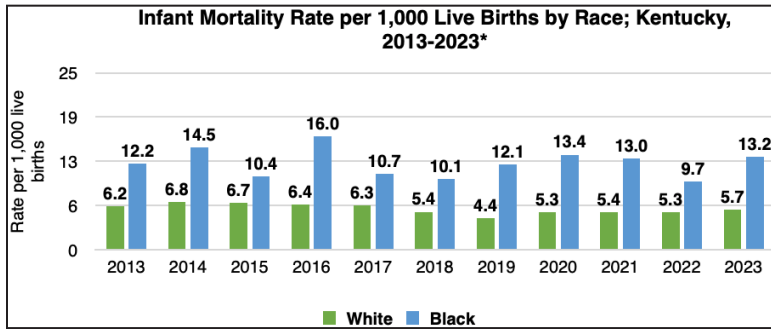
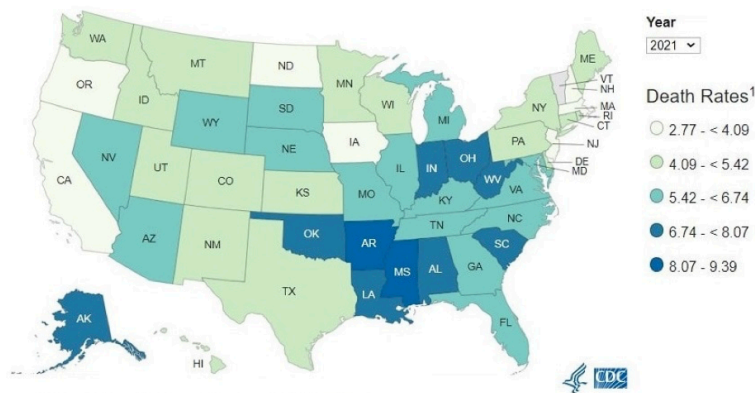


Figure 4: Infant mortality rates by state 2021



<sup>1</sup>The number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

National Center for Health Statistics; Kentucky 15th highest in country in 2021

Figure 5

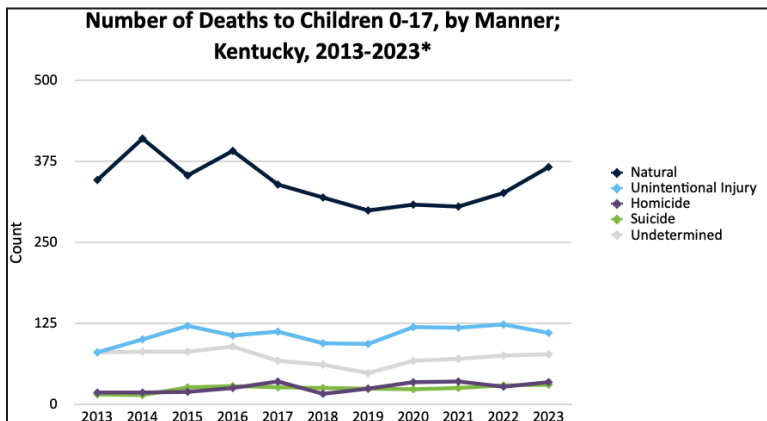
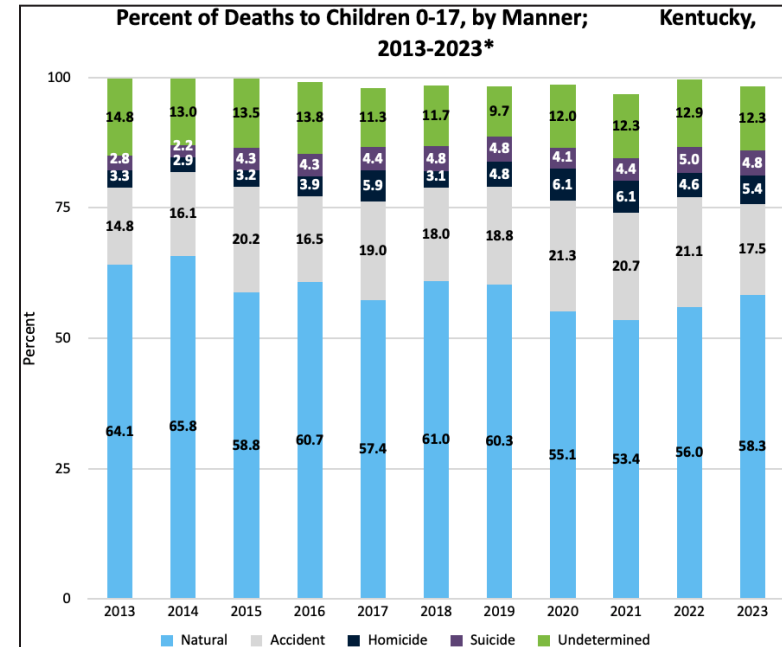


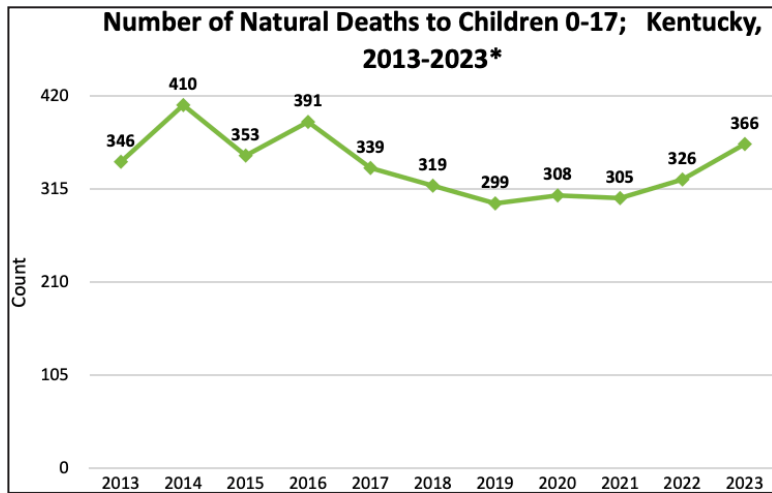
Figure 6



## Natural Deaths

Natural death category includes deaths due to cancer, congenital anomalies (birth defects), preterm births, perinatal conditions, and other health-related causes of death and accounts for 59.2% of child deaths in the 10-year period. While some of these deaths could be preventable under ideal circumstances, these natural causes of death are not considered accidents or unintentional injuries as determined by the assigned manner of death on the death certificate. In this case, the manner is identified as natural.

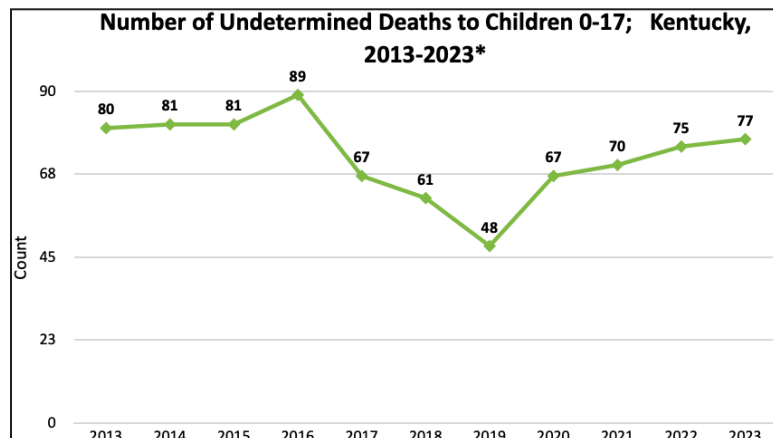
Figure 7



### 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 most frequently occurs in cases where a Kentucky resident dies in another state. Every effort is made by the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics to obtain death certificate information in such cases but delays in reporting and communication barriers often result in deaths where no clear cause can be delineated based on death certificate data alone.

Figure 8

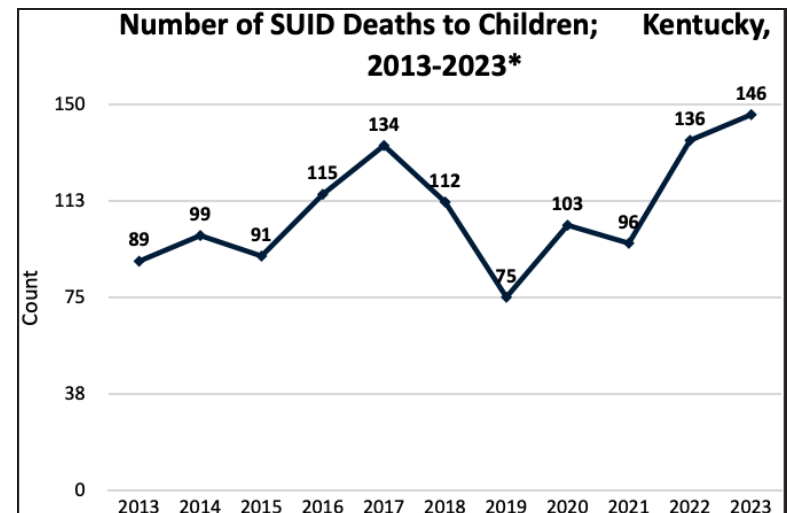


### SUID

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths (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: Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (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 six ICD-10 codes (R95: SIDS, R99: undetermined, W75: accidental strangulation and suffocation in bed, W83: other specified threats to breathing, and W84: unspecified threats to breathing). When potential infant deaths are identified, a multidisciplinary team reviews (child fatality review team) 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 data period are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9



## Unintentional Injury Deaths

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 most preventable deaths for children. Some of the preventable deaths include children that choke on food or toys, are left in a hot car (i.e., hyperthermia), and accidentally shot with a firearm.

Figure 10

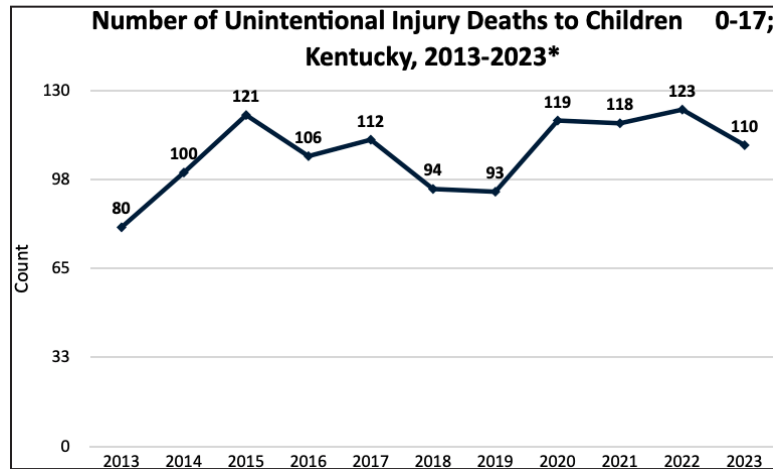
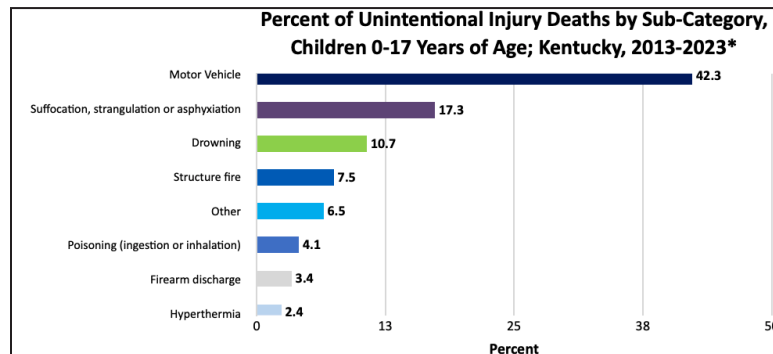


Figure 11

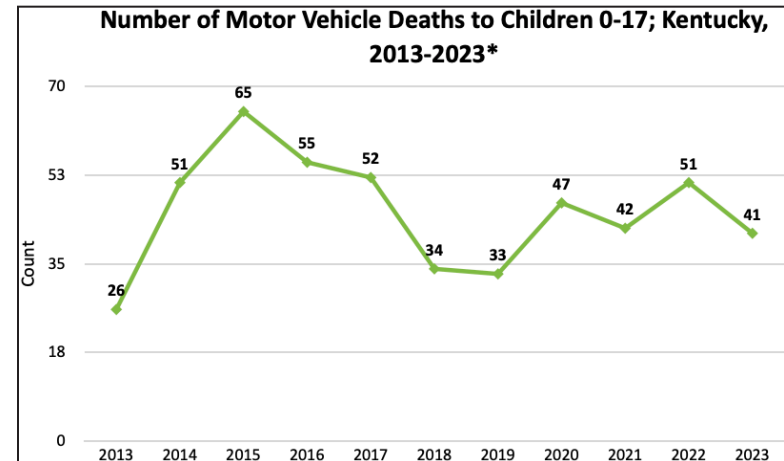


## Motor Vehicle Accidents

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. 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).

When a motor vehicle accident occurs, but the manner is either homicide or suicide, the child’s death will be categorized with either homicide or suicide causes of death and not as an unintentional injury.

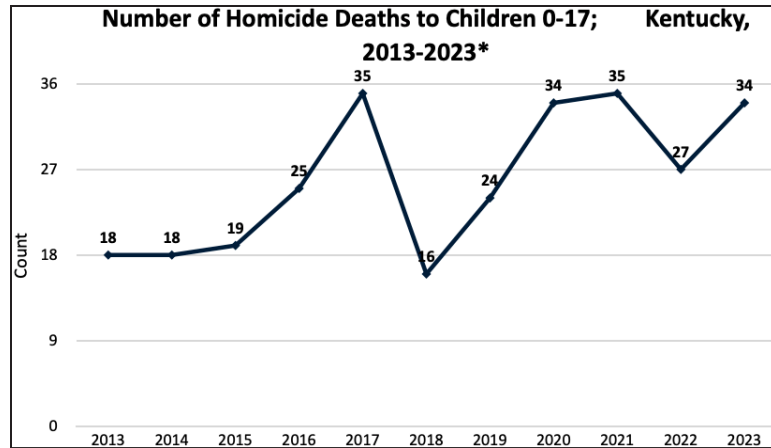
Figure 12



## Homicide Deaths

Homicide deaths 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.

Figure 13

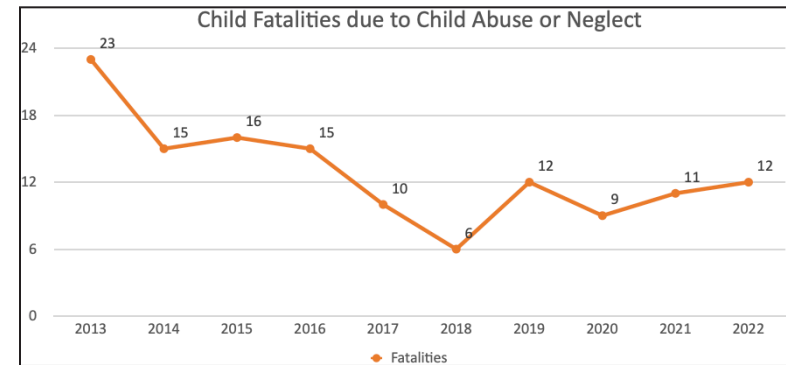


## Abuse, Neglect and Maltreatment

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 vital 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 unspecified homicide deaths in figure 13.

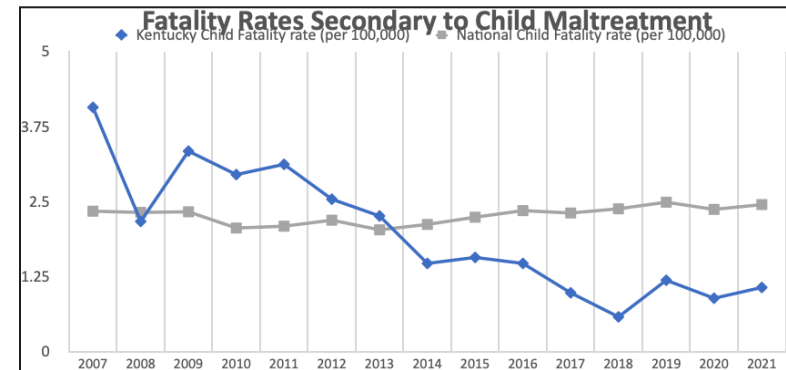
An in-depth review of child fatalities or near fatalities where there was a concern for child maltreatment occurs by the Kentucky Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel. A near fatality is defined by KRS 600.020 as "an injury that, as certified by a physician, places a child in serious or critical condition". Annual reports can be found at <https://justice.ky.gov/Boards-Commissions/cfnferp/Pages/Reports.aspx>.

Figure 14



Data compiled from National Child Maltreatment reports 2013-2023

Figure 15



Data compiled from National Child Maltreatment reports 2013-2023

## 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 and/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 16

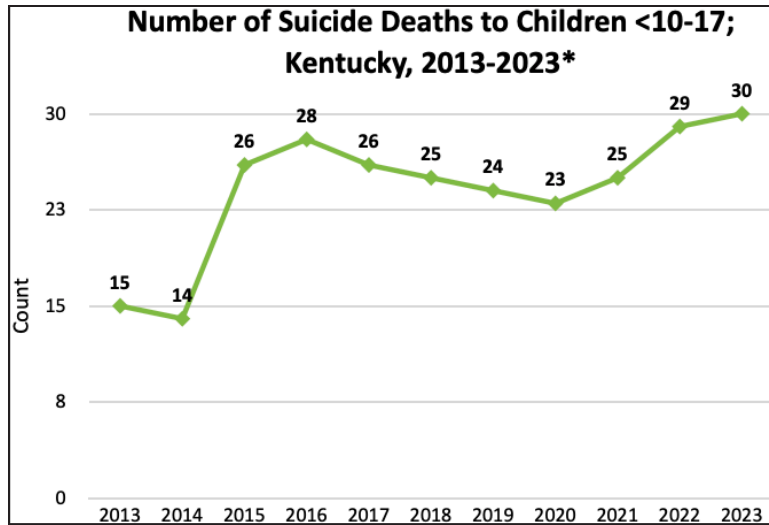


Figure 17

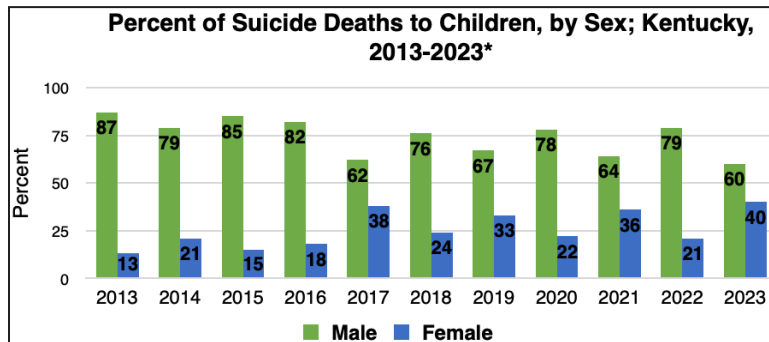


Figure 18

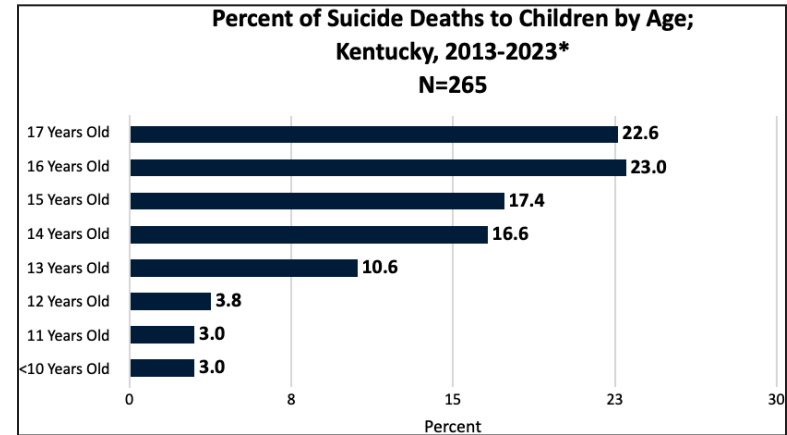
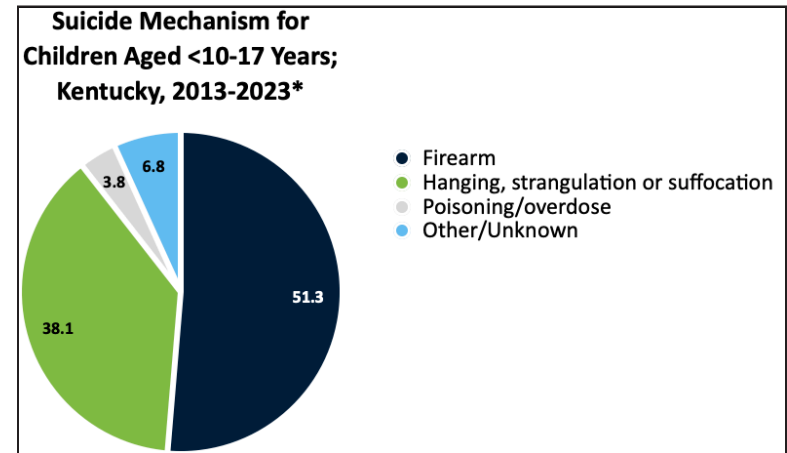


Figure 19



## References

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2024). Child Maltreatment. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>. Years 2012-2022.

External Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Annual Reports located at <https://justice.ky.gov/Boards-Commissions/cfnferp/Pages/Reports.aspx>.

Center for Disease Control causes of infant mortality <https://www.cdc.gov/maternal-infant-health/infant-mortality/index.html>.

Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics, Death Certificate Data, years 2013-2023. \*All data are preliminary and subject to change. Data points are not limited to KY residents and also include out-of-state residents who died within KY.

