

Grounded in Health



KERN
COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH

2023 Report
Child Death Review Team

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This report is to highlight the 2023 Child Death Review Team case reviews, including infant and child deaths that occurred in Kern County during the 2023 calendar year. Specifically, it:

- Presents an overview of the purpose and mission of the Kern County Child Death Review Team (CDRT)
 - Reports the results of child death cases reviewed by CDRT
 - Outlines recommendations made by CDRT for addressing the data trends
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Acknowledgements

CDRT is made possible by the commitment of its members and agencies that are involved. Sincere appreciation and gratitude go to the agencies who participated in the 2023 reviews.

Kern County Public Health

Kern County Sheriff's Office

Kern County Coroner's Office

Kern County Superior Court

Kern County Department of Human Services

Bakersfield Police Department

Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

Adventist Health Delano

Kern County Counsel

California Highway Patrol

Kern County District Attorney's Office

First 5 Kern

Kern County Network for Children

Valley Children's Hospital

Kern County Probation Department

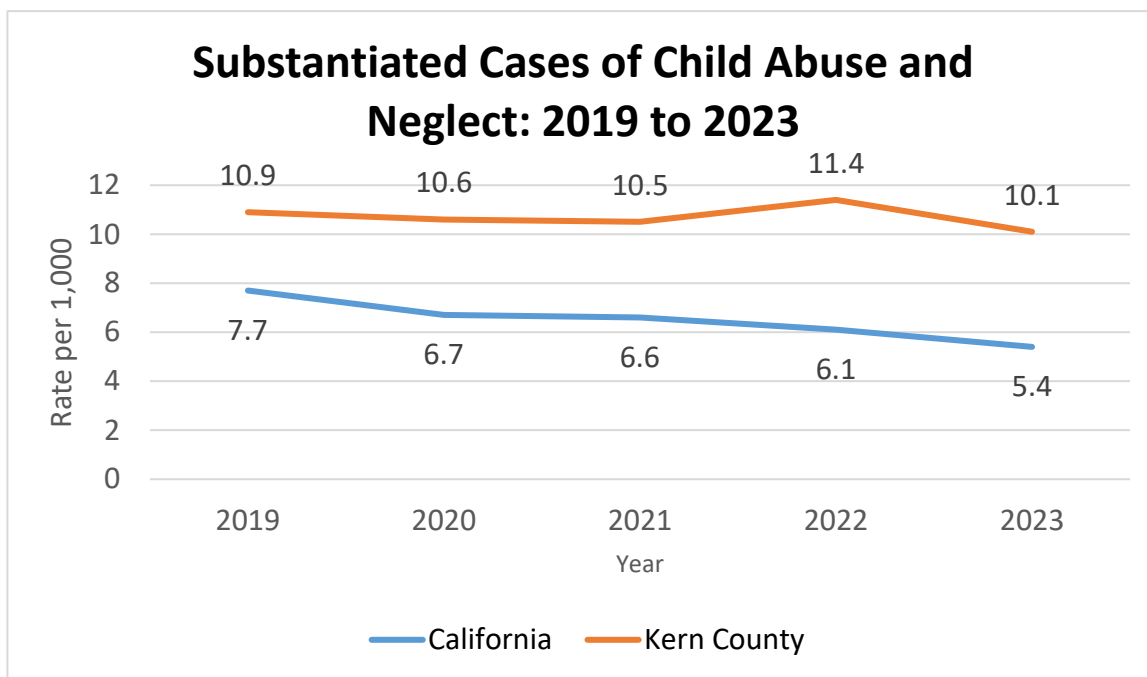
The members of CDRT would also like to thank the Kern County Board of Supervisors for their unwavering commitment to protecting our children.

Mission

The mission of CDRT is to reduce child deaths associated with child abuse and neglect; safety issues regarding social, economic, and health conditions; and other preventable child deaths.

CDRT uses a multi-disciplinary team at the local level that assists in the investigation and management of individual child deaths. Identifying the causes and circumstances of these deaths helps to design strategies aimed at preventing child deaths in Kern. Development of these strategies raises knowledge and awareness and leads to systematic changes, thereby preventing further child deaths.

Rates of substantiated child abuse and neglect in Kern County are trending downward and was the lowest we have seen in Kern County over the last five years in 2023; however, Kern County's 5-year average was almost 65% above statewide rates.



Definition: Number of substantiated cases of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children under age 18.

Data Source: As cited on [Child Maltreatment Substantiation Rates Report - California Child Welfare Indicators Project \(CCWIP\) \(berkeley.edu\)](#), Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Saika, G., Courtney, M., Eastman, A.L., Hammond, I., Gomez, A., Prakash, A., Sunaryo, E., Guo, S., Berwick, H., Hoerl, C., Yee, H., Flamson, T., Gonzalez, A., Ensele, P., Nevin, J., & Guinan, B. (2022). *CCWIP reports*.

History

In 1988, the California legislature authorized each county to establish CDRTs to assist in identifying and reviewing suspicious child deaths and facilitate communication among agencies involved in the prevention of and intervention in fatal child abuse and neglect. Since 1988, Kern County has conducted regular monthly case review meetings.

Case Review Process

CDRT receives and reviews Kern County Coroner's reports on deaths in children aged birth through 17 years in Kern County. Sending a list of cases to team members in advance allows time to search respective agency case files for additional information on the child and his or her family. Discussions at the meetings determine if the death was preventable and what services, education, or intervention could have affected the outcome. The team then either closes or keeps open cases for further review and/or referral to other services, if needed.

At times, CDRT will review cases where a child dies in another county, but is a resident of Kern County; however, Kern County may not always have jurisdiction in these cases. The data in this report only included deaths that Kern County has jurisdiction.

In 2023, 64 cases out of 136 deaths in children under 18 years of age have been included in this report. All 64 cases were the deaths deemed likely preventable by the Kern County Coroner's Office. Data reflected in this report comes from Coroner's reports and the supplemental information provided by team members. To protect the confidentiality of children and families, CDRT presents only aggregate data.

California Child Fatality Surveillance System (CCFSS)

CDRT is involved with CCFSS through the Injury and Violence Prevention Branch at the California Department of Public Health. The CCFSS program started in 1997 and was designed as an active surveillance system for child maltreatment deaths based on completion and submission of standard data collection by local CDRTs. The teams are paid a set amount for each eligible case submitted. Kern County CDRT uses these monies to fund community projects such as the Safe Sleep Project through Kern County Public Health.

Risk Factors for Preventable Childhood Death

Common Risk Factors for Fatal Child Abuse or Neglect¹

- Child—Vulnerability
 - Less than 4 years old, male, prematurity/low birth weight, illness/disability, colic, challenging behaviors, has other siblings under 3 years of age.
- Parental—Parental Capacity
 - Younger age, severe control problems, dependency conflicts, history of abuse/domestic violence, mental illness, jealousy or rejection by child, lack of parenting skills, inability to bond.
- Household—Multifaceted Problems
 - Stressful major life event in past year (death, birth, job loss, move, etc.), less education, history of violence, lack of job skills, criminality, mobile/frequently move, current or prior contact with CPS, change in household composition, non-family members present.
- Environmental—Confounding Issues
 - Living in poverty, high unemployment, increased crime rates, geographical locality, lack of support systems, multiple service providers involved over time, seen by physician following onset of abuse.

Risk factors for Drownings²

- 1–4-year-olds have the highest drowning rates.
- Drowning happens quickly and quietly, so a lack of close supervision increases risk.
- Highest risk drowning locations varies by age. For those under 1 year of age, two-thirds of all drownings happen in bathtubs. For children aged 1 to 4 years of age, most drownings occur in home swimming pools. For children aged 5 to 18, most drownings occur in natural bodies of water.

Risk factors for Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths³

- 4–7-year-olds have a higher incidence of being found not buckled up.
- Driver of vehicle is intoxicated and the child found not buckled up.
- Restraint use among young children often depends on the driver’s seat belt use.
- Child restraint systems are often used incorrectly.

Risk factors for Sudden Unexpected Infant Death⁴

- Maternal age: the infants of 15–19-year-old mothers are at highest risk, while the infants of mothers 35 years and older are at the lowest risk for unexpected death.
- Marital status of the mother: infants of unmarried mothers are at highest risk.
- Sex of the child: males are at an increased risk.

¹ Hughes, K. & Pence-Wilson, D., 2012. Child Maltreatment Fatalities—Risk Factors and Lessons Learned. doi:10.1.1.688.6439

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022. Drowning Facts. Retrieved December 25, 2022 from <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/facts/index.html>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018. Child Passenger Safety: Get the Facts, Risk Factors. Retrieved, August 20, 2018 from https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/child_passenger_safety/cps-factsheet.html

⁴ Healthy People 2020, 2018. Maternal, Infant, and Child Health, MICH-1.9 Reduce the rate of infant deaths from sudden unexpected infant deaths (includes SIDS, Unknown Cause, Accidental Suffocation, and Strangulation in Bed). Retrieved, August 20, 2018 from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/data-search/Search-the-Data#objid=4831>

- Race/ethnicity of the mother: infants of American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American mothers are at higher risk.
- Country of birth mother: infants of mothers born in the United States of American are at a higher risk than mothers born elsewhere.

Risk factors for Teenage Suicide⁵

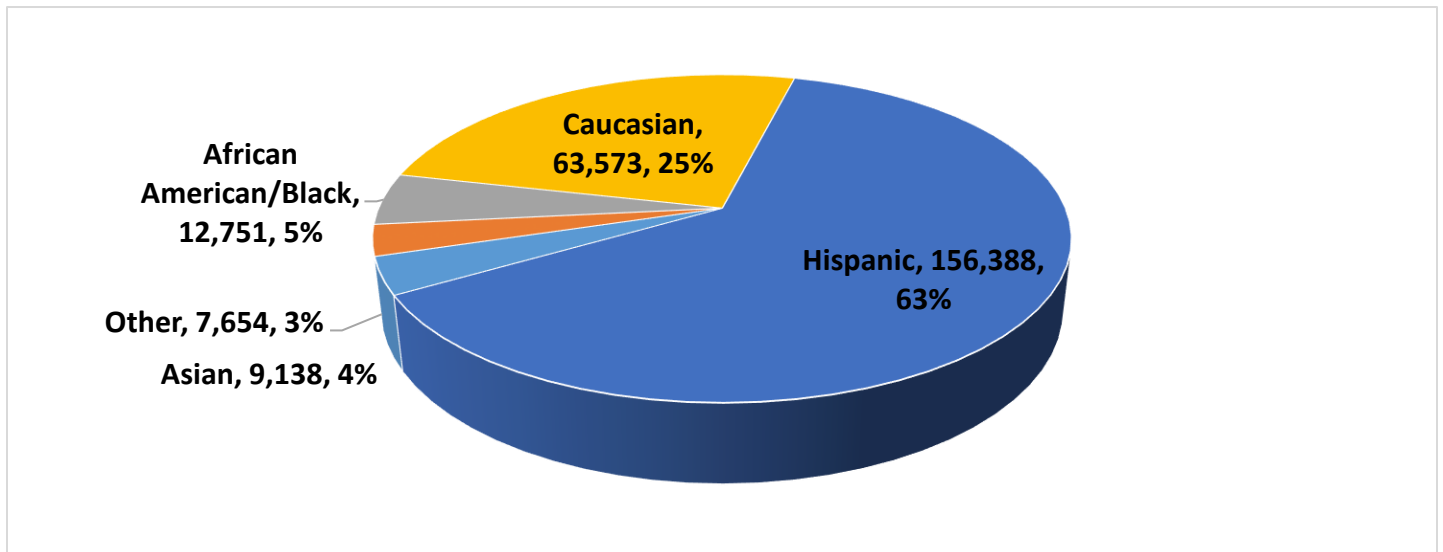
- Depression or other psychological illness
- Drug and alcohol use
- Parental separation or divorce
- Economic status
- Race
- Suicidal ideation
- Poor self-esteem
- Distress
- Poor coping mechanisms (particularly regarding recent relationship issues)
- Sexual orientation
- Victimization
- Lack of social connection and support
- Bullying

⁵ Murphy, K., 2006. What can you do to prevent teen suicide? *Nursing*. 35. 43-5. Doi:10.1097/001521

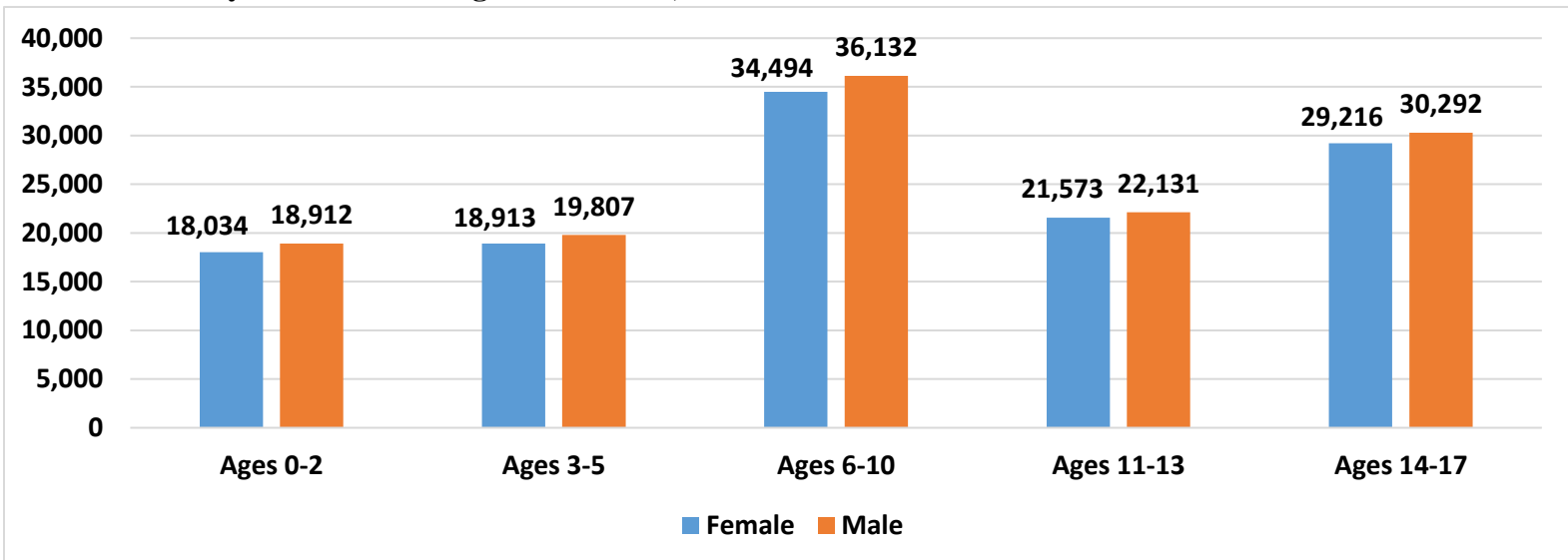
Demographics

Kern County is a large and diverse geographic region of California, comprised largely of agricultural-based communities and regions under urban development. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, roughly 41.3% of Kern County households have child residents.⁶ In 2023, there were 249,504 children of ages 17 and younger residing in Kern County. During this time frame, most of the child population in Kern County identified as Hispanic/Latino (63%) and Caucasian/White (25%). Compared to California as a whole, the Hispanic/Latino child population was 15% greater in Kern County. The male-to-female ratio among children was approximately equal.

Kern County Children aged 0-17 Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2023



Kern County Children 0-17 Age and Gender, 2023



⁶ <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/projections/> (July 2023).

CDRT Terminology

Manner of Death — Manner of death is a set of categories by which we classify deaths as intentional, unintentional, natural, or undetermined. California law requires that all suspicious, violent, and unexpected (decedent was not seen by a physician 20 days prior to death) deaths be reported to the Coroner's Office. The Coroner is then responsible for determining the circumstances, manner, and cause of these deaths.

Accidental/Unintentional – These deaths are the result of unintentional injury. Examining these cases allows CDRT to identify prevention strategies to deter future injuries.

Natural – Natural deaths are from disease or other medical conditions other than injury. CDRT surveillance of deaths from natural causes helps inform support programs that focus on maternal and prenatal health, well-child exams, immunizations, and health screenings.

Homicide – Death at the hands of another.

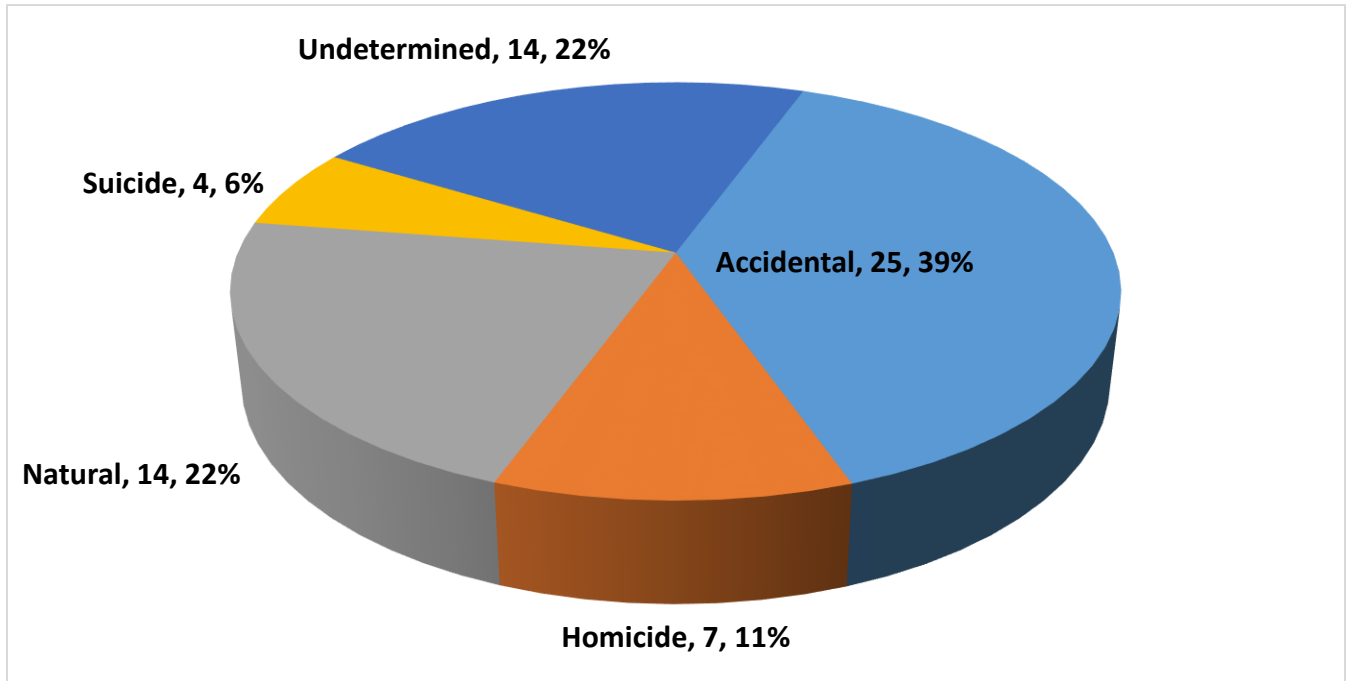
Suicide – Death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent of self-harm.

Undetermined – Situations in which the Coroner is unable to determine a conclusive manner of death. This can result from insufficient or conflicting information. CDRT reviews many deaths that occur in an unsafe sleep environment; often, the manner in these deaths is undetermined.

Cause of Death – The actual mechanism producing the death; it must be distinguished from the manner of death as these terms are often confused. For instance, if homicide is the manner of death, then possible causes of death under homicide may include head trauma, gunshot wound, suffocation, poisoning, etc.

Manner of Death

Manner of Preventable Deaths 2023



Key Highlights and Comparisons

In 2023, accidental (25) was the leading manner of childhood deaths reviewed by the team. Homicides saw an increase in 2023 (7) compared to 2022 (3) but less than 2021 (9). Suicide deaths decreased 33% from 2022 (6) to 2023 (4). This also marks the second year in a row that suicide deaths have decreased, dropping 50% since 2021 (8). Undetermined deaths saw a slight decrease from 2022 (17) to 2023 (14).

Cause of Death

Cause of Death 2023

<i>Accidental (25)</i>	
Blunt force trauma, including motor vehicle accidents	13
Acute fentanyl toxicity	4
Drowning	2
Multi-drug intoxication including fentanyl	1
Gunshot wound of head	1
Asphyxia/hanging	1
Hyperthermia due to exposure of high environmental temperature	1
Intrauterine Fetal Demise	1
Thermal Injuries w/Inhalation of Combustible Products	1

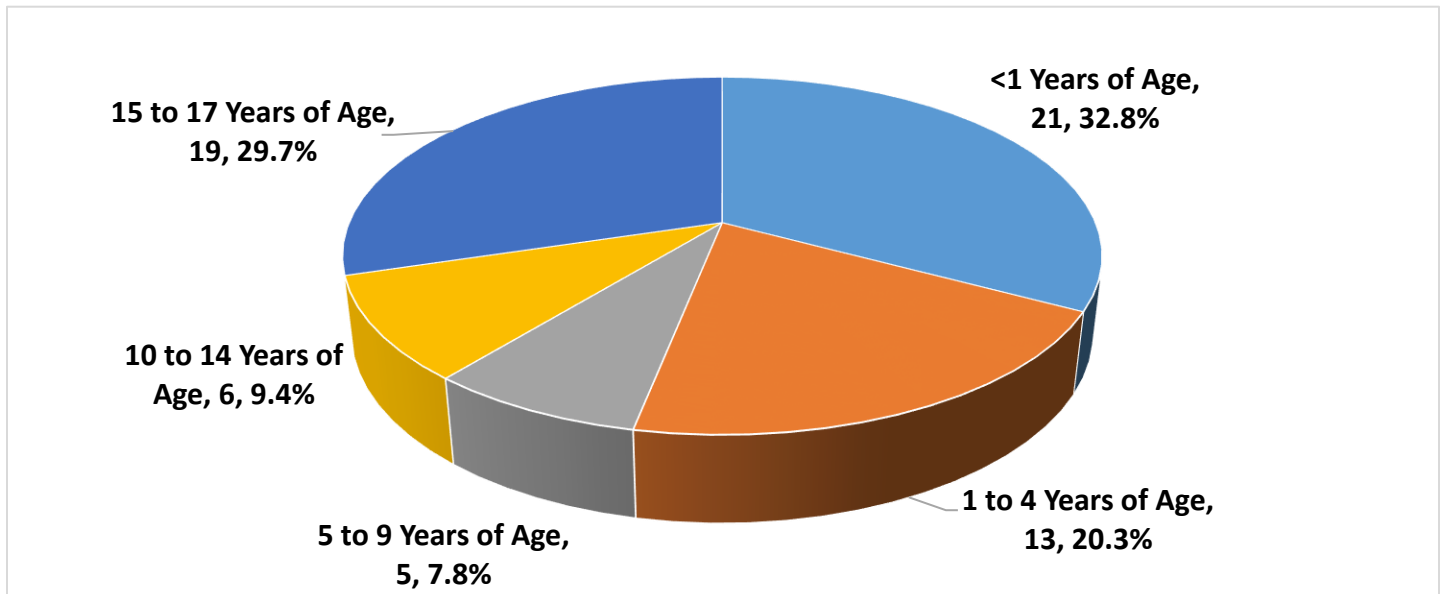
<i>Homicide (7)</i>	
Gunshot wounds	4
Obstruction of large intestine	1
Acute Fentanyl and Methamphetamine toxicity	1
Acute Fentanyl Toxicity	1
<i>Natural (14)</i>	
Seizure disorder	2
Acute Appendicitis	1
Acute Chorioamnionitis	1
Acute Intestinal (Ileum) Volvulus	1
Acute Pneumonia	1
CDKL5 Deficiency Disease	1
Epilepsy	1
Intrauterine Demise - Chorioamnionitis	1
Ruptured Developmental Venous Anomaly of the Cerebellum	1
Sepsis of newborn, acute chorioamnionitis, probably due to streptococcus Group D	1
Sequelae of Cerebral Palsy	1
Sequelae of Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 1	1
Smothering due to Benign Neoplasm of Posterior Soft Palate	1
<i>Suicide (4)</i>	
Asphyxia/hanging	3
Gunshot wound	1
<i>Undetermined (14)</i>	
Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID)	8
SUID contributing: unsafe sleep	2
SUID contributing: Co-Sleeping with Parents and Methamphetamine and 4-ANPP Intoxication	1
Acute Morphine Toxicity and other unknown factors	1
Intrauterine Demise of Undetermined Etiology	1
Undetermined	1

Key Highlights and Comparisons

In 2023, motor vehicle accidents (13) were the leading cause of accidental deaths with a 62.5% increase from 2022 (8). Acute fentanyl toxicity deaths (4) were the second leading cause in accidental deaths which was slightly higher than 2022's (3) deaths. Drowning deaths decreased significantly from 2022 (6) to 2023 (2) accounting for a 67% decline. Multi-drug intoxication including fentanyl decreased 75% in 2023 with 1 death compared to 2022 (4). Gunshot wounds accounted for 4 of the 7 homicide deaths. Natural deaths consisted of various illnesses, diseases, and medical conditions. Suicide deaths decreased in 2023 for the second straight year and asphyxia/hanging remained the main cause. SUID led undetermined children's deaths but was 21% lower than 2022.

Reviewed 2023 Child Deaths by Age Group

Preventable Deaths by Age 2023



Preventable Deaths by Month 2023

Age Group	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<1 Years of Age	1	1	-	-	2	3	2	-	6	1	1	4
1 to 4 Years of Age	-	1	-	2	2	1	2	1	-	3	1	-
5 to 9 Years of Age	1	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
10 to 14 Years of Age	1	2	1	2	1	4	1	1	2	2	2	-
15 to 17 Years of Age	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-
Total Per Month	3	6	3	4	7	9	5	3	9	6	4	5

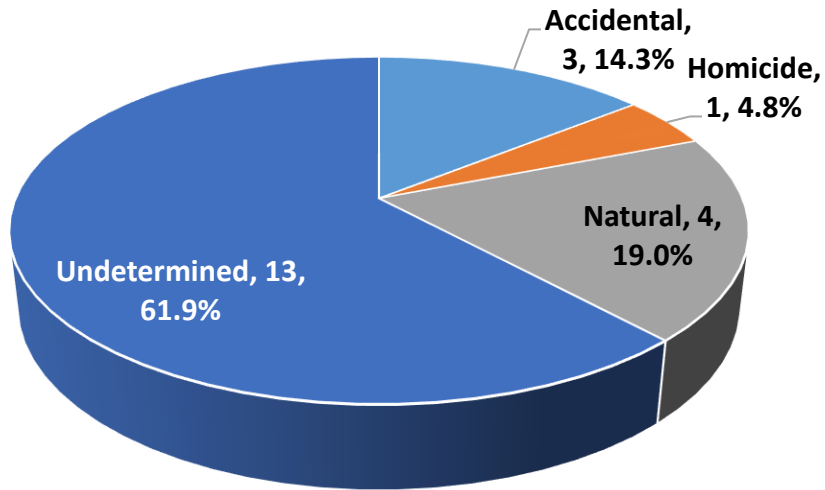
Key Highlights and Comparisons

32.8% of the 64 deaths reviewed by CDRT occurred in children less than 1 year of age. June and September saw the highest number of deaths with 9 each and January, March and August saw the lowest number of deaths with 3 each.

Child Deaths Reviewed by Age and Manner

Children less than a year of Age

Preventable Deaths: <1 year of age 2023



Preventable Deaths per Year: <1 year of age 2023

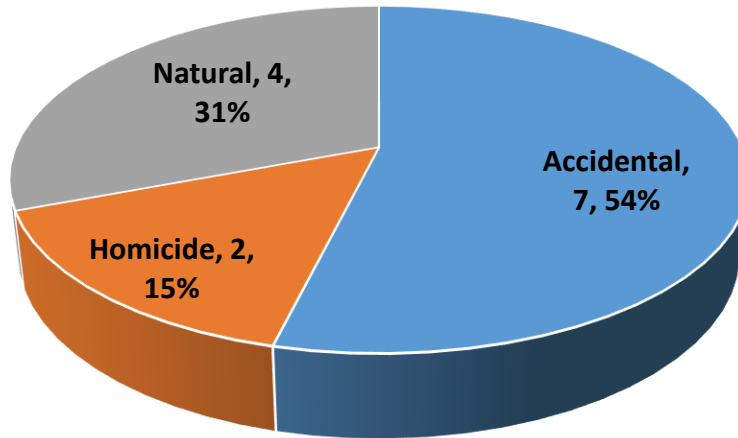
	<1 Years of Age
Accidental	3
Homicide	1
Natural	4
Undetermined	13

Key Highlights and Comparisons

For children less than a year of age, 2023 had 3 deaths due to an accidental manner and 1 death due to a homicide. Children less than a year old accounted for 21 or 32.8% of all child deaths reviewed by the CDRT. Undetermined was the leading manner of death for this age range, accounting for 13 or 62% of the deaths. Overall, out of the 21 deaths in this age range, 13 or 62% had an unsafe sleeping environment.

Child Deaths Reviewed by Age and Manner Children 1 – 4 Years of Age

Preventable Deaths: 1 – 4 years of age 2023



Preventable Deaths per Year: 1 – 4 years of age 2023

	1 to 4 Years of Age
Accidental	7
Homicide	2
Natural	4
Suicide	-
Undetermined	-

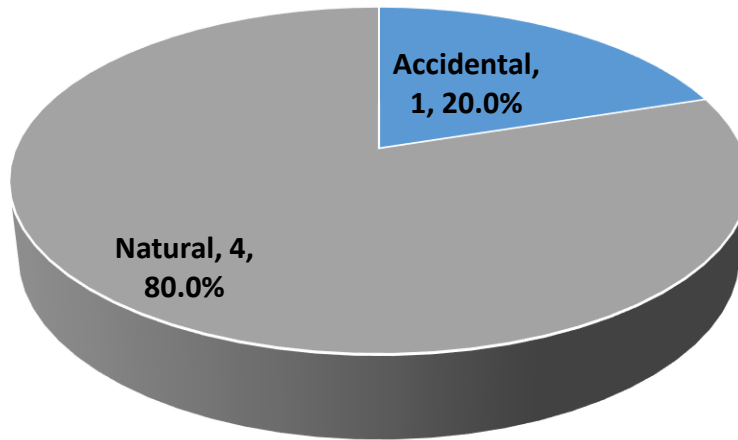
Key Highlights and Comparisons

In 2023, preventable child deaths in the 1–4-year age range stayed consistent with 2022 with thirteen (13) deaths. Accidental deaths remained the same and accounted for 7 or 54% of the 13 deaths in this age range. Of these 7 accidental deaths, 1 or 14% was due to drowning which occurred in a pool. This is down 29% from 2022. There were 2 motor vehicle accident deaths that occurred during this time frame that included pedestrian accidents.

Child Deaths Reviewed by Age and Manner

Children 5 – 9 Years of Age

Preventable Deaths: 5 – 9 years of age 2023



Preventable Deaths per Year: 5 – 9 years of age 2023

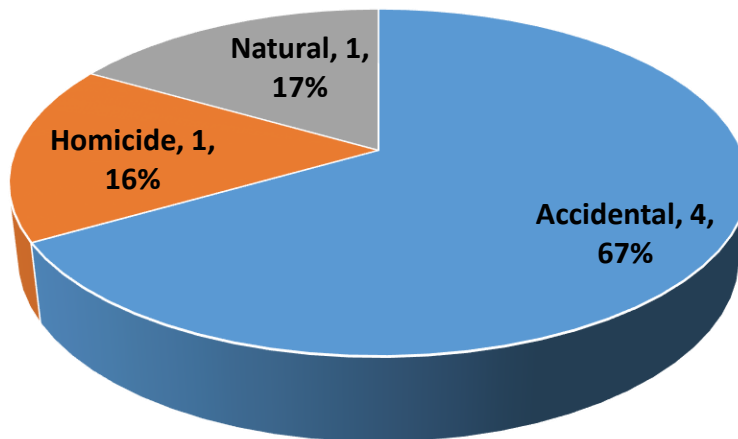
	5 to 9 Years of Age
Accidental	1
Homicide	-
Natural	4
Suicide	-

Key Highlights and Comparisons

Deaths in 5–9-year-olds accounted for 7.8% of all cases reviewed by CDRT in 2023. The 1 accidental death was a motor vehicle related accident. In 2022 there were 3 drownings and there were no drowning deaths in 2023 in this age range, which is a 100% decrease.

Child Deaths Reviewed by Age and Manner Children 10 – 14 Years of Age

Preventable Deaths: 10 – 14 years of age 2023



Preventable Deaths per Year: 10 – 14 years of age 2023

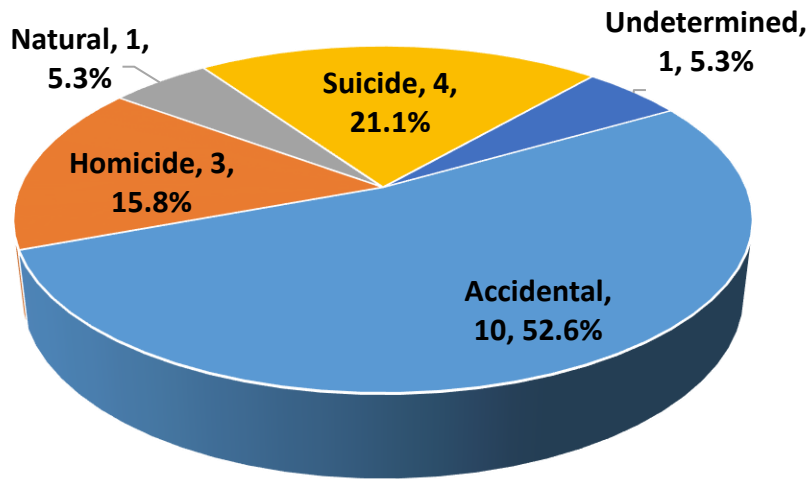
	10 to 14 Years of Age
Accidental	4
Homicide	1
Natural	1
Suicide	-

Key Highlights and Comparisons

During 2023, accidental deaths accounted for 4 or 67% of all preventable deaths in the 10–14-year-old age group and of the 4 accidental deaths 3 were the result of motor vehicle accidents and 1 was fentanyl related. This is very similar to the findings from 2022’s data in this age group.

Child Deaths Reviewed by Age and Manner Children 15 – 17 Years of Age

Preventable Deaths: 15 – 17 years of age 2023



Preventable Deaths per Year: 15 – 17 years of age 2023

	15 to 17 Years of Age
Accidental	10
Homicide	3
Natural	1
Suicide	4
Undetermined	1

Key Highlights and Comparisons

52.6% of the preventable deaths in 2023 in the 15–17-year-old range were accidental deaths, which is a slight increase of 11% from 2022 (9). Of these 10 accidental deaths, 6 were motor vehicle accident related, including unrestrained passengers, 2 were from fentanyl toxicity, and 1 was from multidrug intoxication including fentanyl. Homicide deaths (3) accounted for 15.8% of the deaths in this age range with a 40% decrease from 2021 (5), but slight increase from 2022 (2). All homicides in this age range were gunshot related. Suicide deaths (4) accounted for 21% of the deaths in this age range and saw a 33% decline from 2021 (6) but a 33% increase from 2022 (3).

Kern County Childhood Health Disparities

According to Healthy People 2020, a health disparity is defined as “a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage⁷.” Health disparities can be organized by various topics such as sex, race/ethnicity, education level, and household income. “Measuring disparities in health status requires three basic components: (1) an indicator of health status, (2) an indicator of social grouping associated with different levels of social advantage or disadvantage, and (3) a method for comparing the health indicator across social groups¹⁰.”

Figure 8. Health Disparities: Kern County Preventable Childhood Deaths by Race 2023

Asian			Black/African American			Caucasian			Hispanic			Other*			
Count	Population	Rate	Count	Population	Rate	Count	Population	Rate	Count	Population	Rate	Count	Population	Rate	
0	9,138	0.00	8	12,751	62.74	15	63,573	23.59	36	156,388	23.02	5	7,654	65.32	
Rates are per 100,000															
									Native American		Pacific Islander		Multiracial		Total
									939		231		7909		9079
*These are the populations in other															

Key Highlights and Comparisons

When comparing the race of CDRT reviewed deaths in Kern County children for the year 2023, it was found that Black/African American children had a preventable death rate of almost 2.7 times higher than White and Hispanic children. In 2023 Black/African American, Hispanic and Other had rate increases when compared to 2022.

⁷Healthy People 2020, 2018. Disparities, Foundation Health Measures. Retrieved Sept. 7, 2018 from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/about/foundation-health-measures/Disparities>

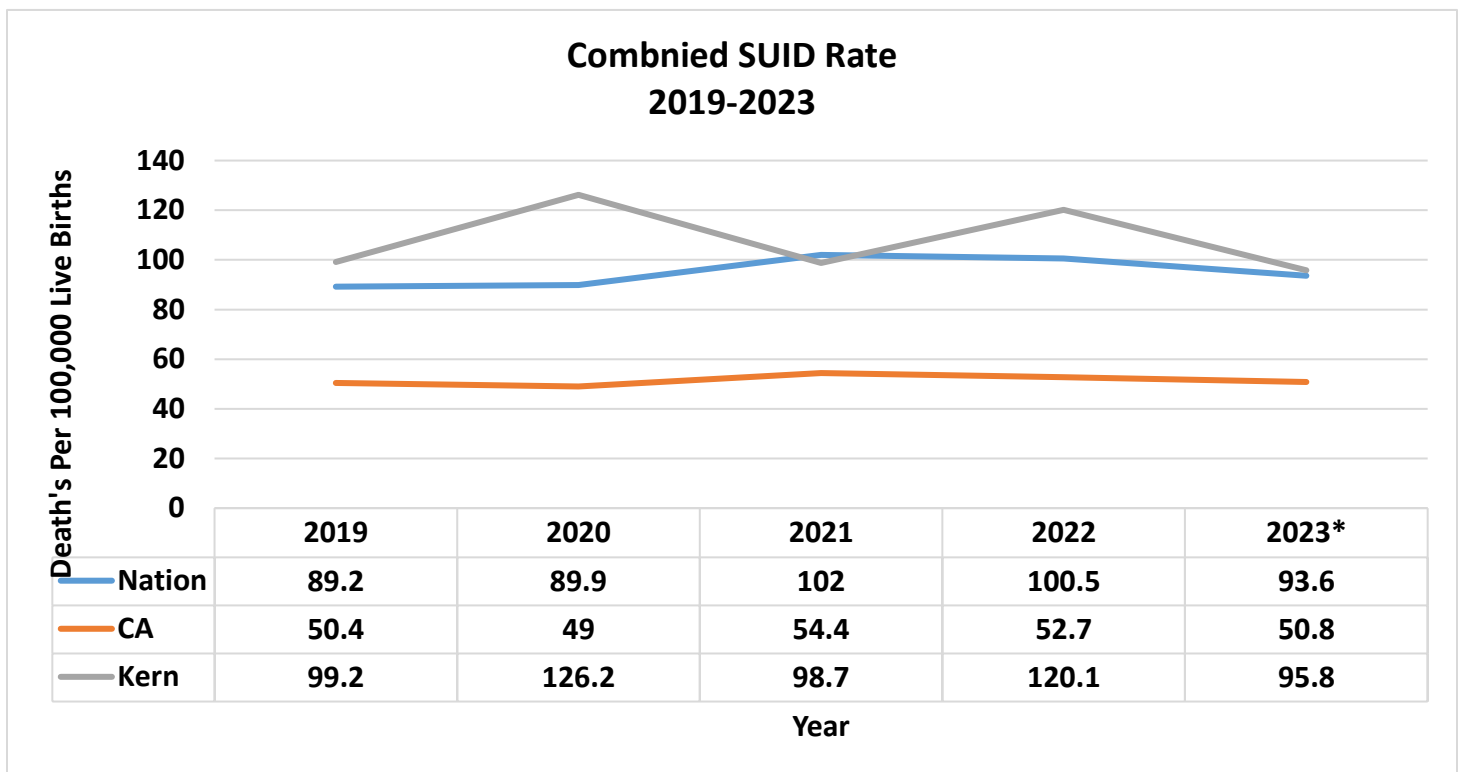
¹⁰ The Secretary’s Advisory Committee on National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives for 2020, 2008. Measuring Health Disparities and Health Equity, Phase I Report, Recommendations for the Framework and Format of Healthy People 2020. p.77. https://www.healthypeople.gov/sites/default/files/PhaseI_0.pdf

Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

Sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) is a term used to describe the sudden and unexpected death of a baby less than one year old in which the cause was not obvious before investigation. These deaths often happen during sleep or in the baby’s sleep area. Sudden unexpected deaths include sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), accidental suffocation in a sleeping environment, and other deaths from unknown causes (CDC, 2022).

In 1990, nationally, the combined SUID rate, which includes sudden infant death syndrome, unknown cause, and accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed, was 154.6 deaths per 100,000 live births. The SUID rate declined considerably following the release of the American Academy of Pediatrics safe sleep recommendations in 1992, the initiation of the Back to Sleep campaign in 1994, and the release of the Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation Reporting Form in 1996. Since 1999, declines have slowed. From 2019 to 2023 the national average SUID rate was 95 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Kern County’s SUID rate for 2019 to 2023 was 108 deaths per 100,000 live births (there were 62,535 live births in Kern County for the years of 2019 to 2023). Kern County’s 2019 to 2023 SUID rate is 110% higher than California’s SUID rate and 14% higher than the national rate during the same time frame.

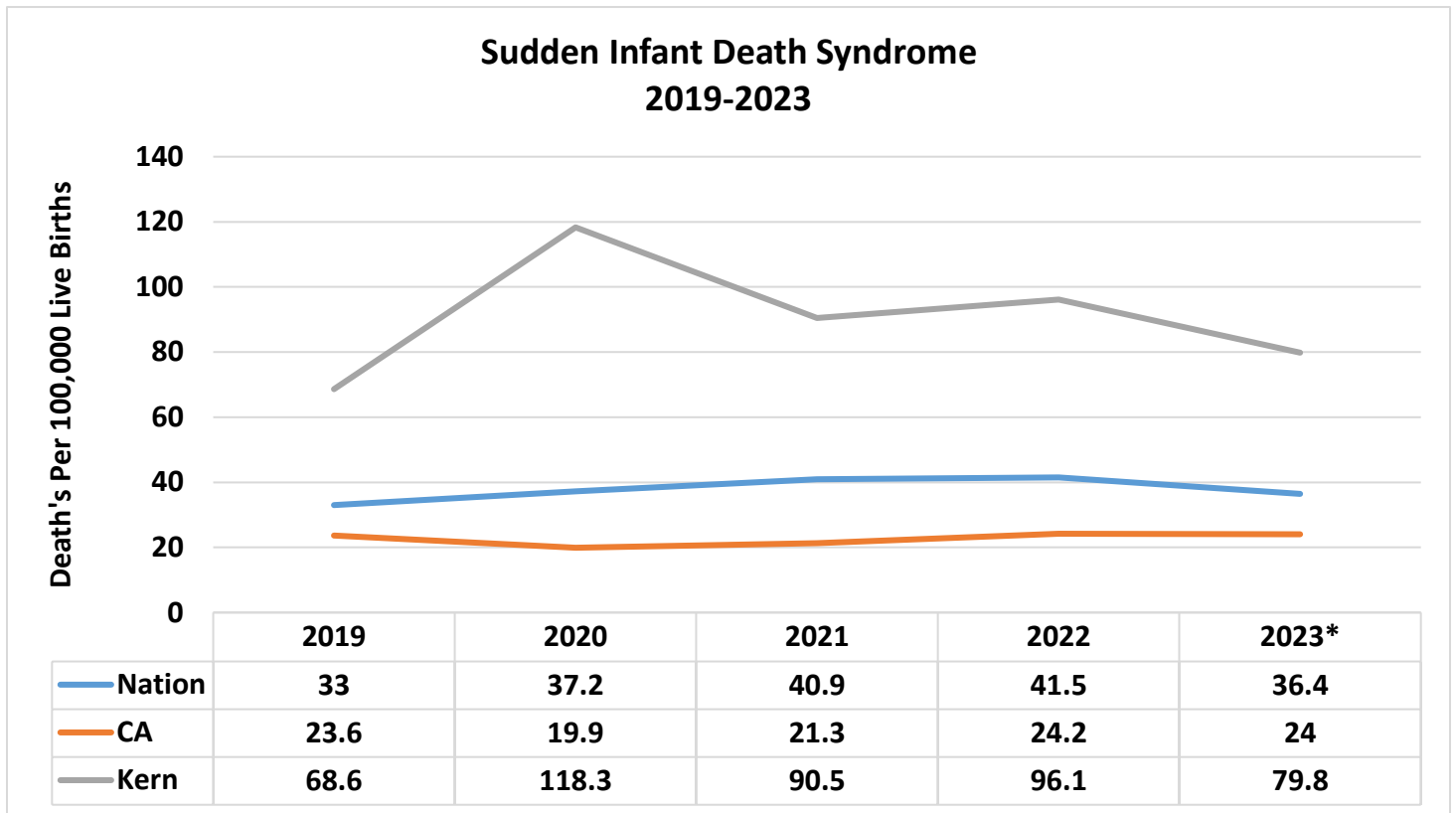


*2023 data is provisional

CDC, 2023 – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sudden Unexpected Infant Death and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Data and Statistics. <https://www.cdc.gov/sids/data.htm>. July 2023.

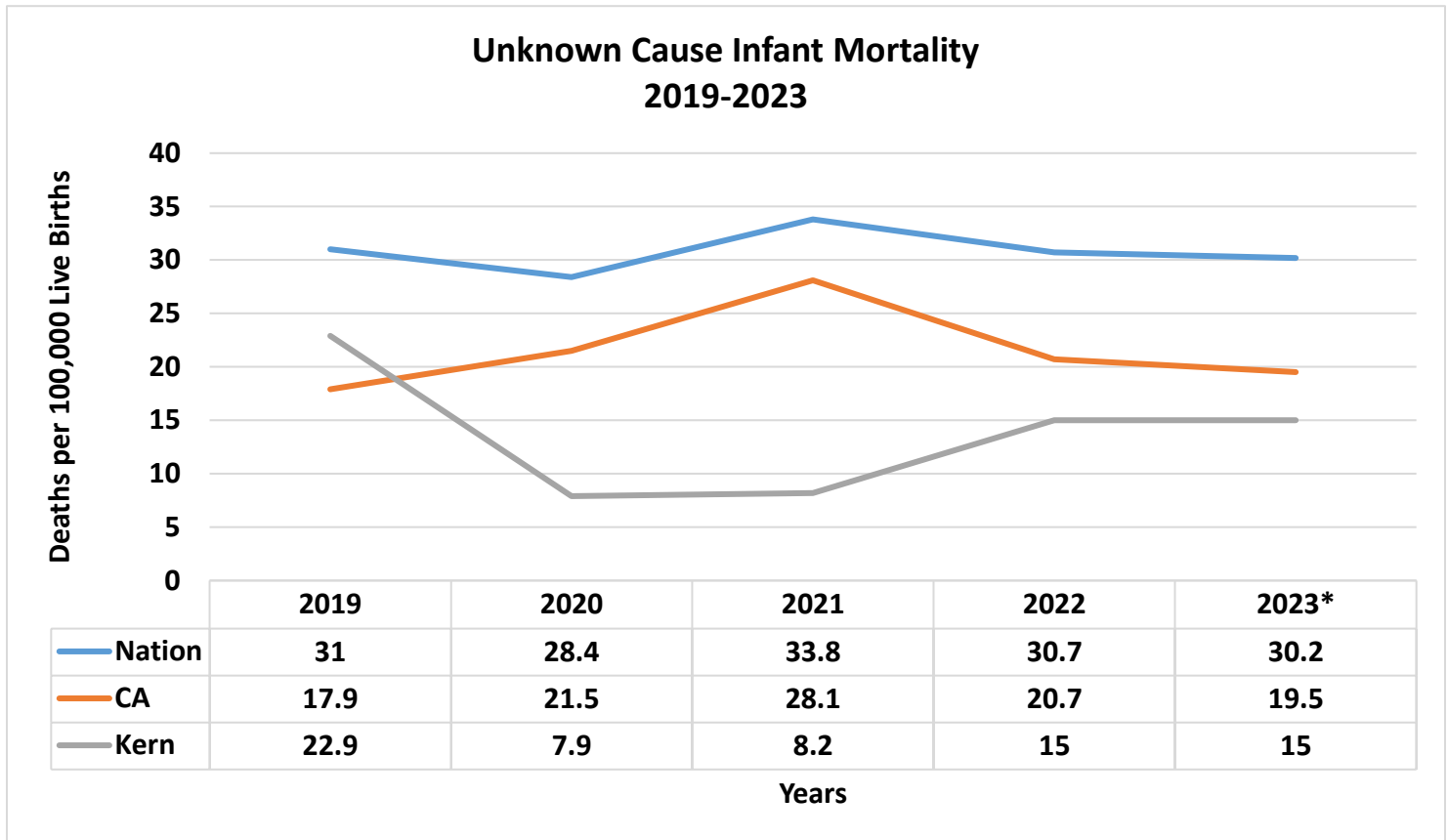
CDC WONDER – 7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sudden Unexpected Infant Death and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Data and Statistics. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/datarequest/D159.jsessionid=BD44808B13678AD45EDF7822CD5C> July 2023.

The combined SUID rate, which includes sudden infant death syndrome, unknown cause, and accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed is further broken down with the data provided below:



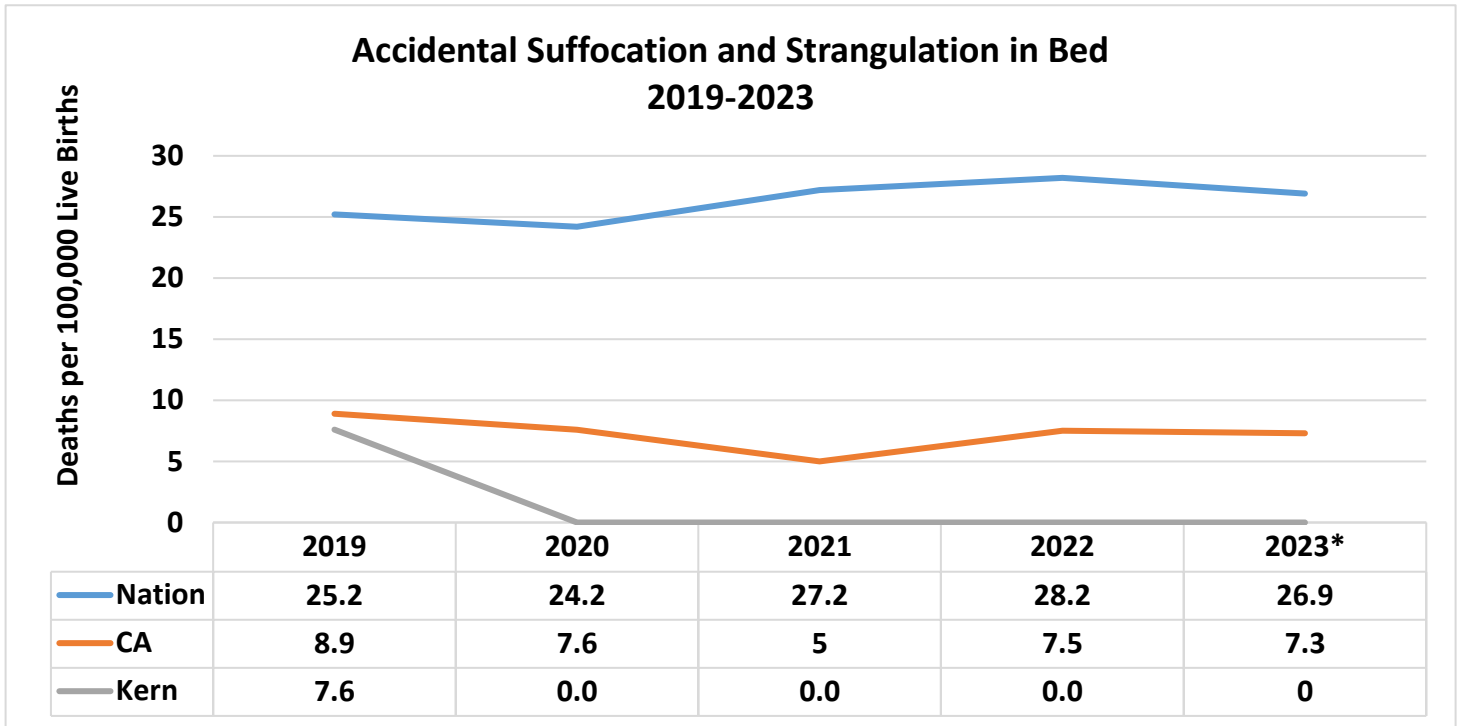
*2023 data is provisional

National sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) rates declined considerably from 130.3 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to an average of 38 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2019 to 2023. Kern’s SIDS rates averaged 91 deaths per 100,000 live births over the last 5 years, which was 301% higher than California and 140% higher than the national rate. Kern saw an increase in SIDS rates from 2021 to 2022; however, experienced a decline in 2023. 2023 data is still provisional.



*2023 data is provisional

Unknown cause infant mortality rates remained unchanged from 1990 until 1998, when rates began to increase. From 2019 to 2023, the national average unknown cause mortality rate in infants was 31 deaths per 100,000 live births. 2021 marked the highest it has been since 1990. Kern’s average rate from 2019 to 2023 was 14 deaths per 100,000 live births. Kern saw a rate increase of 93% from 2021 to 2022 and remained consistent with 2023. 2023 data is still provisional. From 2019 to 2023 California’s 5-year average was 56% higher than Kern's average and the 5-year national average was 123% higher than Kern’s.



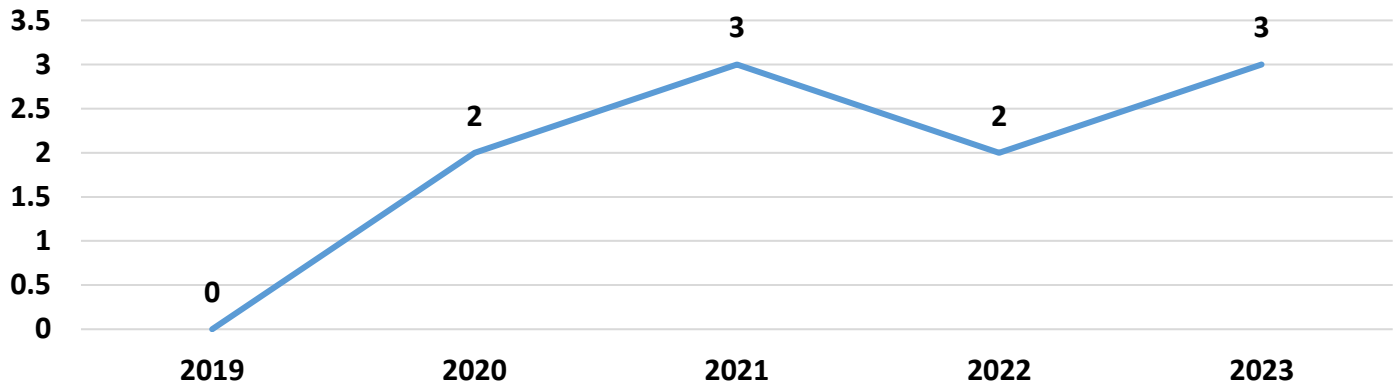
*2023 data is provisional

Accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed (ASSB) mortality rates remained unchanged until the late 1990s. Rates started to increase beginning in 1997 and reached the highest rate at 28.2 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2022. From 2019 to 2023, the national average rate was 26.3 deaths per 100,000 live births. Kern County averaged 1.5 deaths per 100,000 live births during the same five-year period. During this five-year period, California’s average was 384% higher than Kern’s average and the national average was 1633% higher than Kern’s. Data for 2023 is provisional.

Infant Deaths with Unsafe Sleep Environments 2019-2023

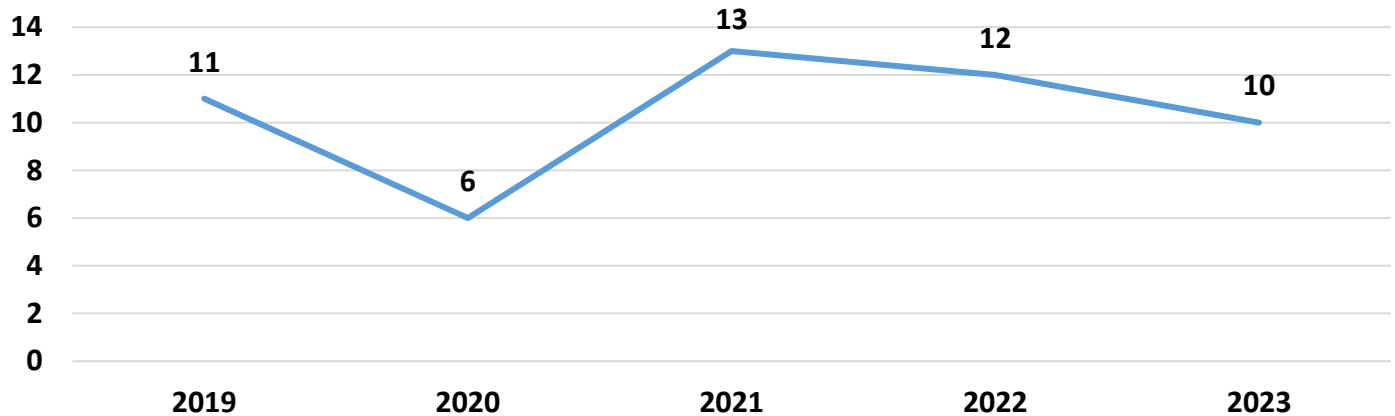
Infant Deaths with Unsafe Sleep Environments Identified by the Coroner* 2019-2023

*Includes all infant deaths identified by the Coroner as having an unsafe sleep environment as a contributing factor to cause death.



Infant Deaths with Unsafe Sleep Environments Identified by the Coroner or an Unsafe Sleep Environment was Present* 2019-2023

*Includes all infant deaths identified by the Coroner as having an unsafe sleep environment as a contributing factor to cause death or where an unsafe sleep environment was present, but not found by the Coroner to be contributory to the death of the child.



Key Highlights and Comparisons

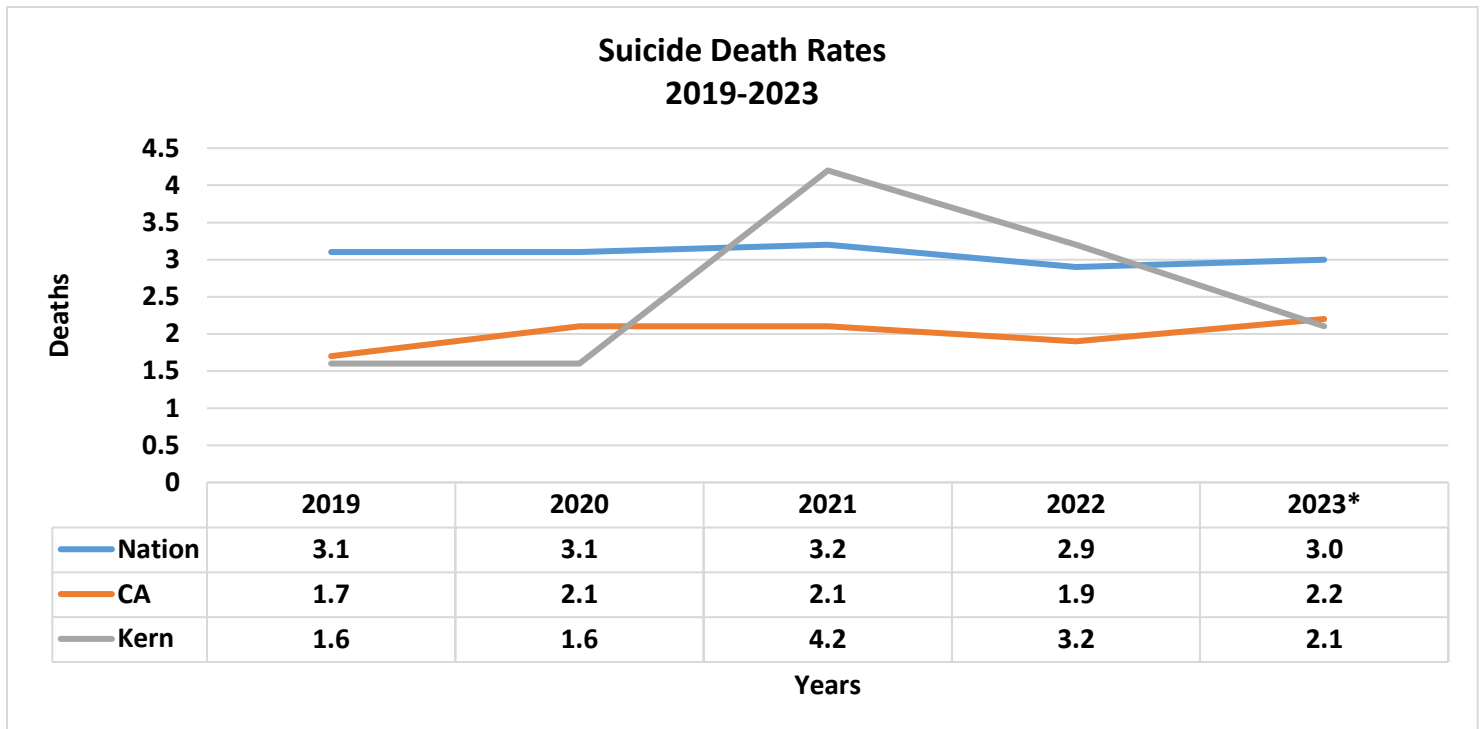
From 2019 to 2023, infant deaths related to unsafe sleep environments averaged 10.4 deaths per year. There was a pattern of decline, which unfortunately rose again in 2021 with 13 deaths, but we have seen a steady decline ever since. Specifically, 2022 had 12 deaths and 2023 had 10 deaths with an unsafe sleep environment. Unsafe sleep environments continue to be an issue and a contributing case of infant death in Kern County. Community partners have worked to provide pack-n-plays and safe sleep education to parents and guardians. Several programs have been developed and are currently providing pack-n-plays:

- Kern County Public Health – Safer Sleeping Education Project
- Kern Medical – Safe Home, Safe Baby
- Bakersfield Memorial Hospital – Safe Sleep Certified, Gold Status by Cribs for Kids
- Safe Sleep Coalition, in collaboration with Kern Literacy Council and First 5 Kern - provide safe sleep books to area hospitals and community partners for new parents.
- Safe Kids Kern

Suicide

Suicide is death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is connected to other forms of injury and violence, as people who have experienced violence, including child abuse, bullying or sexual violence have a higher suicide rate.

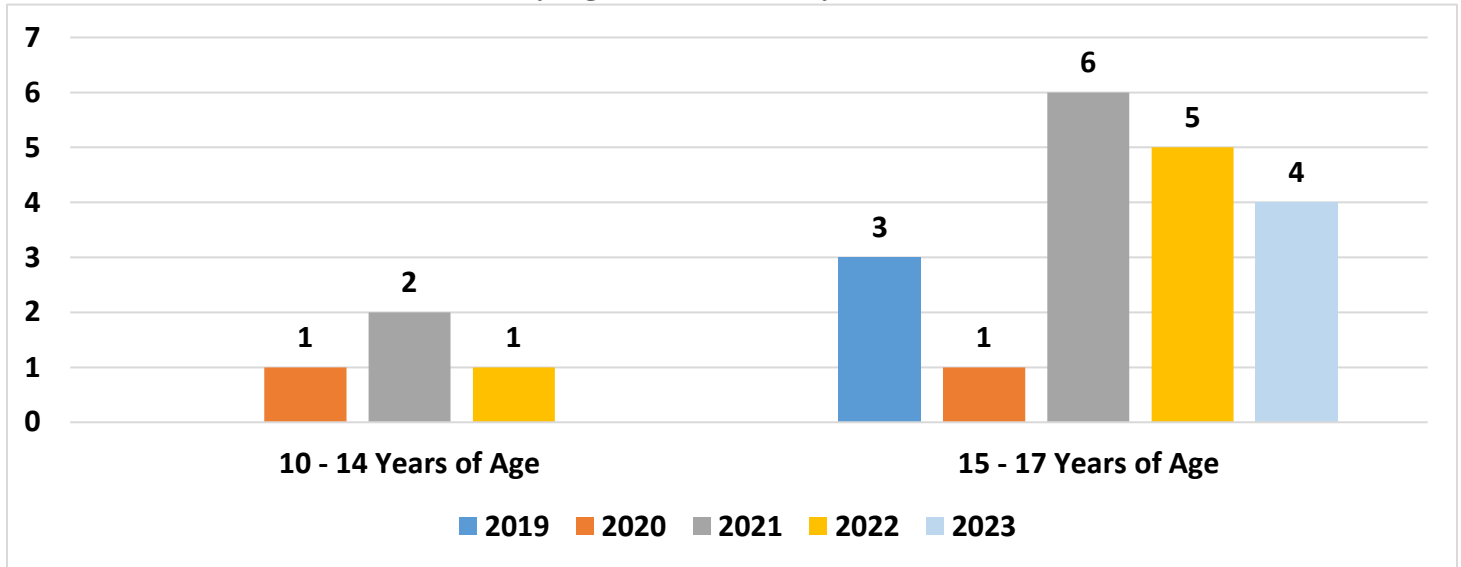
Suicide was the second leading cause of death for people ages 10-14 nationwide.



*2023 data is provisional

The average nationwide suicide rate from 2019 to 2023 was 3.1 deaths per 100,000 in 5–17-year-olds. During this same time frame, the California average rate was 2.0 deaths per 100,000 and Kern County was 2.5 deaths per 100,000 in 5–17-year-olds. Kern County’s 2019 to 2023 suicide rate was 27% higher than California’s rate and the national average was 17% higher than Kern’s. In 2021, Kern’s suicide death rate exceeded both the national and the state rate. In 2023, Kern’s rate decreased and fell below the national and state rate.

Five-Year Childhood Suicide Review by Age in Kern County, 2019 – 2023



For 0-9 years of age there were 0 suicide deaths.

Key Highlights and Comparisons

Most of Kern’s child suicides between 2019 and 2023 were in the 15–17-year-old category, which accounted for 19 of the 23 suicide deaths. 2021 saw a 300% increase in suicide deaths from 2020, but over the last 2 years Kern has seen a 50% decrease in child suicide deaths.

Five-Year Childhood Suicide Review by Method in Kern County 2019– 2023

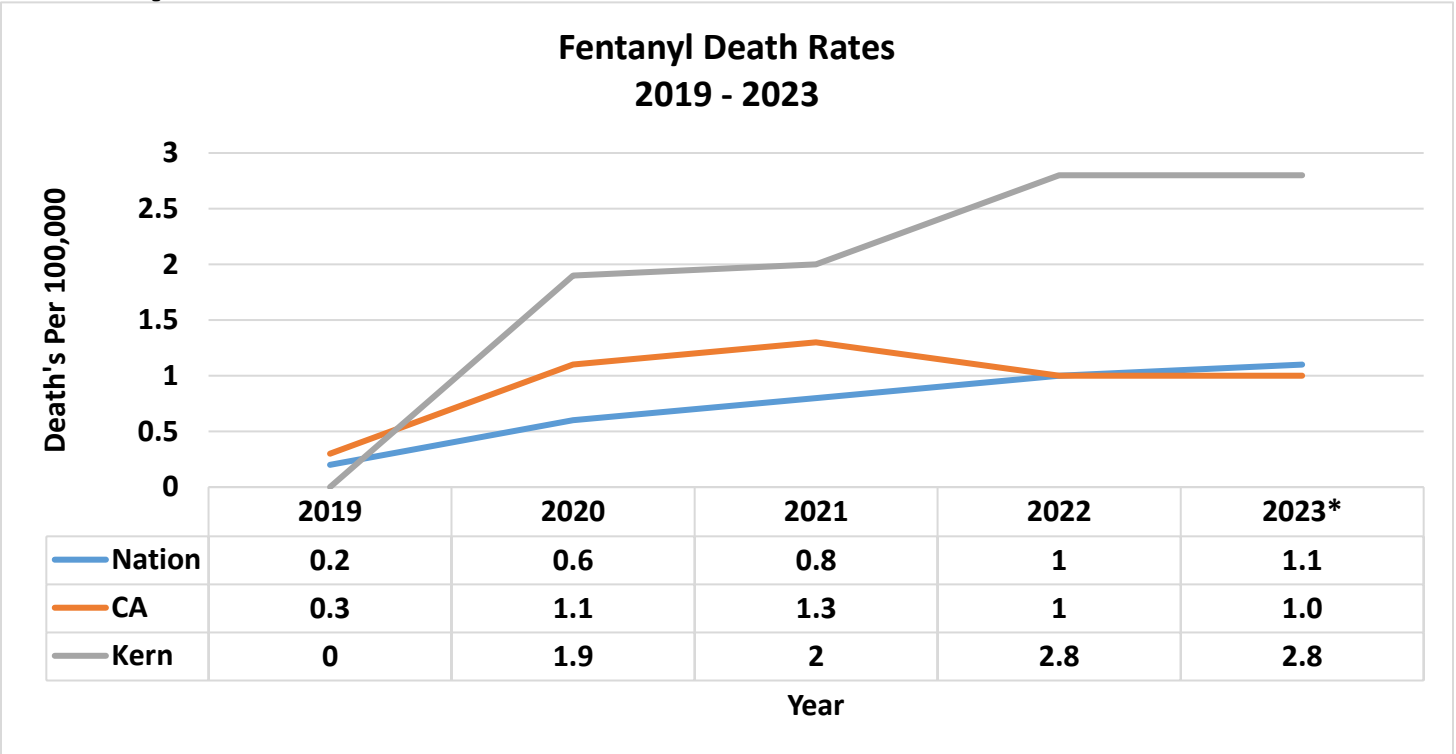
10 - 14 Years of Age	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Asphyxia			2		
Gunshot Wound of Head		1			
Acute Acetaminophen, Hydrocode, Sertraline and Citalopram Toxicity				1	
15 - 17 Years of Age					
Asphyxia	1	1	4	4	3
Gunshot wound of head	2		2		1
Thermal Burns				1	

There were no suicide deaths in the 5–9-year age range during this time frame.

Key Highlights and Comparisons

Asphyxia, which includes hanging and smothering, is the most used method of suicide for adolescents in Kern County over the past 5 years, accounting for 15 or 65% of total suicide deaths.

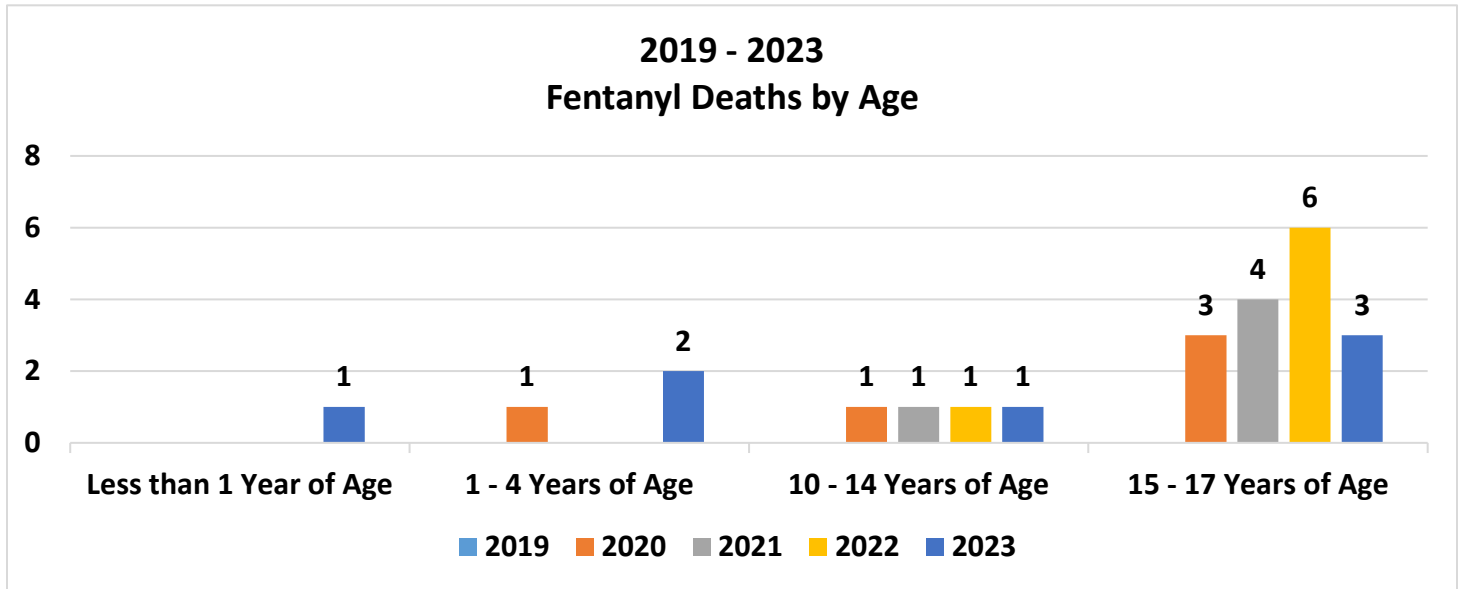
Fentanyl



*2023 data is provisional

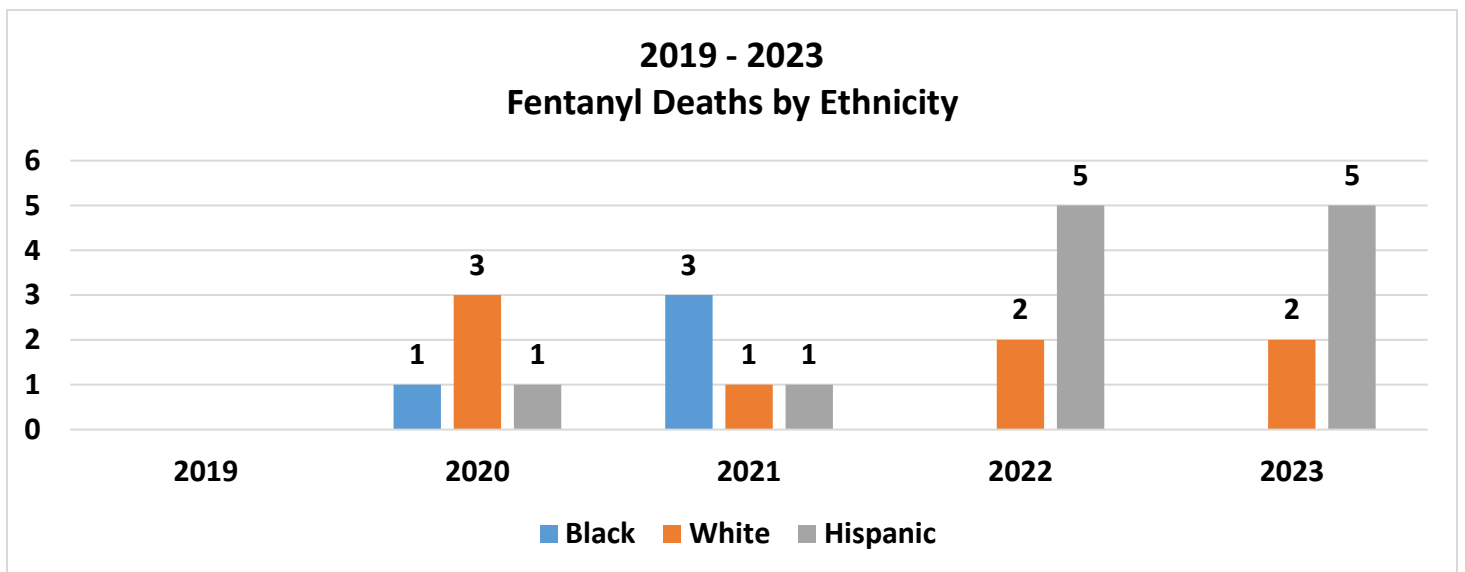
The average nationwide fentanyl death rate from 2019 to 2023 was .74 deaths per 100,000. During this same time frame, the average California rate was .94 deaths per 100,000 and Kern County was 1.9 deaths per 100,000. Kern County’s 2019 to 2023 fentanyl rate was 102% higher than California’s and 157% higher than the nation.

Five-Year Childhood Fentanyl Review by Age and Ethnicity in Kern County, 2019 – 2023



Key Highlights and Comparisons

Fentanyl deaths have risen over the last 5 years at a steady pace. Kern saw a 40% increase in child fentanyl deaths from 2021 to 2022. In 2023, fentanyl deaths remained the same at 7. The age group 15 -17 has seen the largest number of deaths (16) over this 5-year period. Hispanics were the most impacted group, with a 400% increase from 2021 to 2022 but stayed the same in 2023.



Current Successful Kern County Programs Aimed at Reducing Preventable Childhood Deaths

Black Infant Maternal Health Initiative – Formed in February of 2021 from a Kern County Public Health and First 5 Kern collaboration, this initiative was created to address disparities in health outcomes in Kern County Black women, babies and children. Local government organizations, community-based groups, faith-based organizations, non-profits and community members come together to conduct focus groups and education healthcare providers to improve the health of Kern County’s Black mothers and children.



Black Infant Health – A free, voluntary, evidence-based program aimed to improve health among African American mothers and babies by empowering pregnant and mothering African American women to make healthy choices for themselves, their families, and their communities. The program includes prenatal and postpartum educational intervention group sessions, culturally sensitive case management, support of early and continuous prenatal care, linkages to related community resources and services, and advocacy of timely immunizations and well-baby check-up exams being up to date.



Nurse-Family Partnership – A voluntary, evidence-based program to help new mothers (with low to moderate income and eligible for Medi-Cal or Emergency Medi-Cal) develop skills to take better care of themselves and their babies. Participants have their own specially trained Public Health Nurse who makes home visits during pregnancy and throughout the first two years of the child’s life.



Perinatal Outreach Program – The program aims to promote optimal pregnancy health and birth outcomes by providing brief intervention in-home support and educational services to low-income pregnant women residing in Kern County. The case management services are offered to pregnant women who are low-income and Medi-Cal eligible. Participants will be assigned a case manager and/or Public Health Nurse to assist gaining access to health coverage and linkage to health providers.



Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Program – The SIDS Coordinator must contact the parent or guardian within three days after Coroner’s notification of a SIDS-related death and provide bereavement services and linkage to bereavement resources. A completed report associated with the case is submitted to the California SIDS Program within 30 days notification by the Coroner’s Office. This program is funded by the California Department of Public Health under Maternal Child Adolescent Health (MCAH).

Safer Sleeping Education Project – The project provides parents and caregivers one-on-one education on SIDS and Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) prevention practices and what a safe sleep environment looks like. Public Health Nurses and support staff provide safer sleep education and SIDS risk reduction. The staff evaluates the child’s current sleep environment and administers a pre-test before educating caregivers and a post-test to measure understanding of the education program. The staff will make an unannounced follow-up home visit to evaluate appropriate use of the pack-n-play and maintenance of safer sleeping practices.



Safe Sleep Coalition – Formed in March 2017, the coalition of organizations and hospitals from around Kern County work together to create a universal safe sleep message and provide education and prevention opportunities. Many organizations involved in the coalition work to provide safe sleep environments to families in need. The Safe Sleep Coalition meets bi-monthly.

Cribs for Kids designated Bakersfield Memorial Hospital as Safe Sleep Certified, Gold Status – The hospital is only one of three hospitals in California with Gold Status Safe Sleep Certified. To qualify for this distinction, the hospital must develop and maintain a Safe Sleep Policy that adheres to the American Academy of Pediatrics; provide staff infant safe sleep training; and provide safe sleep education to the parents prior to discharge. Through the Safer Sleeping Education Project (SSEP), the hospital staff received safe sleep education training from the SSEP Coordinator.

Safe Kids Kern – This coalition started in August 2023 with the partnership of Safe Kids Worldwide campaign. The primary purpose is to keep kids safe from preventable injuries, including motor vehicle injuries, pedestrian safety, drownings, poisonings, and suffocations, by collaborating with community partners to educate children, parents, and caregivers through a multifaceted approach to childhood injury prevention. Injury topics will be addressed through the following:



- **Child Passenger Safety Education Program (AKA Car Seat Program)** – This program stresses the importance of having a car seat for your child because road injuries are the leading cause of unintentional deaths in the United States. Correctly used child safety seats reduce the risk of death by as much as 71 percent. The goal is to keep families safe. After parents/guardian have completed the education program online or in person and based on the child’s age, weight, and height, one of the following passenger seats may be provided: a 5-Point Harness booster or a convertible safety seat. A nationally certified car seat safety technician will be available to show how to properly install the child’s car seat and answer any questions.
- **Water Watchers** – The program designates a Water Watcher which is a responsible adult who agrees to watch the kids in the water without distractions and wear a Water Watcher card. After a certain amount of time (i.e. 15 minutes), the Water Watcher card is passed to another adult, who is responsible for the active supervision. Cards are available to the public at the Public Health Department.



Kern County Child Abuse Prevention Council – Kern County Network for Children (KCNC) was designated by the Kern County Board of Supervisors as Kern’s Child Abuse Prevention Council on October 27, 2009. KCNC fulfills the following required roles and activities for Child Abuse Prevention Councils (CAPC) by:

- Providing a forum for interagency cooperation and coordination in the prevention, detection, treatment, and legal processing of child abuse cases;
- Promoting public awareness of the abuse and neglect of children and the resources available for intervention and treatment;
- Encouraging and facilitating training of professionals in the detection, treatment, and prevention of child abuse and neglect;
- Recommending improvements in services to families and victims; and
- Encouraging and facilitating community support for child abuse and neglect programs.

Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (KBHRS) offers several programs in suicide prevention. KBHRS recognizes that the key to prevention is to ensure that those who care for our youth, parents, teachers, probation officers and neighbors are aware of signs and know how to help:



- **Zero Suicide** – Evidence-based zero suicide model that specializes in training and implementing screenings. The goal is to increase awareness of warning signs of suicidal risk and increase intervention to eliminate suicide in Kern County. The program began internally within KBHRS and will be expanded to local hospitals, primary care providers, Federally Qualified Health Centers, law enforcement, schools and community partners.
- **Mental Health First Aid** – Aims to reduce stigma and teaches that individuals experiencing mental health challenges can and do get better, and that community members’ willingness to step forward and help can be lifesaving to someone in distress. This evidence-based model is provided to teachers, social workers, juvenile justice probation staff and any other community member who has a desire to learn how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders.
- **Access to Care-Hotline-Outreach and Education Team** – Outreaches to Kern County high schools and other Community partners to provide suicide prevention and awareness with health classes, to increase awareness of depression and anxiety, suicide warning signs, asking the “suicide” questions and where to get help.
- **Community and School-Based Services** – Every school in Kern County has a Behavioral Health Provider assigned to provide services to youth when needed and be a resource to the educational system. In addition, frequent in-services are provided to schools, Kern County Probation, Kern County Department of Human Services (DHS) and other community partners to ensure they have the knowledge to access help for a family, when needed.
- **Prepare U Program** - Nationally recognized curriculum that teaches students social emotional learning aimed at decreasing mental health stigma, increases communication about behavioral health wellness, access to care, and reducing unnecessary loss of life. KBHRS has partnered and shared this curriculum with Kern County schools.
- **Access to Care Hotline** – Crisis Hotline receives approximately 2100 Transitional Age Youth (TAY) calls a year and 400 calls from youth under the age of 14 a year. Callers are assisted through crisis, and many are struggling with suicide thoughts and behaviors. Hotline staff collaborate with callers on safety plans to keep them safe. Beginning in July 2022, access to the Crisis Hotline was simplified with the launch of the three-digit 988 number, replacing the previously used nine-digit number.
- **Youth Brief Treatment – Same Day Access** – This program was established to be responsive to youth at risk of repeated incarceration, school failure/dropout and to reduce/eliminate instances of suicide, suicidal ideation and self-harm. It is available across the Children’s System of Care in geographic locations throughout Kern County.

- **Transitional Age Self Sufficiency Project** – KBHRS partners with Kern County Superintendent of Schools, Dream Center to serve foster care and homeless TAY youth. This program works closely with the TAY team to link youth that are experiencing behavioral health episodes to intensive specialty mental health services.
- **Juvenile Justice Engagement** – This program provides screening and intervention to the juvenile justice population and their families with the intent of identifying suicide ideation, self-harming and other mental health issues that may lead to prolonged suffering.

KBHRS offers programs for those in acute crisis:

- **Mobile Evaluation Team** – The Mobile Evaluation Team (MET) is dispatched by law enforcement when a mental health crisis is identified in the community. MET provides crisis intervention, voluntary and involuntary assessment for psychiatric hospitalization, and follow-up in the community.
- **Psychiatric Evaluation Center** – The Psychiatric Evaluation Center/Crisis Stabilization Unit (PEC/CSU) and Ridgecrest CSU is an urgent care psychiatric unit with the goal of providing psychiatric care in the least restrictive environment possible, while still maintaining a safe, locked facility. The PEC/CSU is the designated facility for non-emergency medical services involuntary psychiatric evaluation in Kern County for minors and adults. The goal of the PEC/CSU is to resolve the immediate crisis within a few hours, and to provide linkage to appropriate follow-up resources.

Post-Intervention Response – KBHRS is available to respond to schools, DHS, Probation, and community members to help facilitate healing, and mitigate negative effects of exposure to suicide.

Mental Health Services Act Full-Service Partnerships:

- **Youth Wraparound** – Wraparound services are located throughout the Children’s System of Care. This is a strength-based approach that strives to intervene with children that have complex behavioral health needs. The youth served by this program have had high risk behavioral health episodes that have led to provisions of crisis services including the PEC.
- **Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Team** – The TAY Program serves some of our highest risk youth between the ages of 16-25 emancipating from foster care. The goal of these services is to identify early onset behavioral health issues and intervene quickly to help navigate a successful transition into independent adulthood, supporting youth in a variety of life-functioning domains. The evidence-supported model of Transitions to Independence Process (TIP) is utilized to address issues that are unique to this population. This team is stationed at the Dream Center and works collaboratively with other youth serving agencies to provide cross-system referrals and treatment.
- **Youth Multi-Agency Integrated Services Team (MIST)** – Youth MIST helps children who are dealing with behavioral health and social challenges and are at-risk of being removed from their homes or are in the process of being reunified with their families. Through a unique partnership between KBHRS, Kern County Department of Human Services, and Kern County Probation Department, an array of intensive services is available to each child to help set up goals and a path to recovery.

Kern County CDRT Recommendations

- 1. Significantly increase community awareness, education, and resources regarding the association between unsafe sleep environment and SIDS/SUID deaths with the goal of having every infant born in Kern County with a safe place to sleep upon discharge home from the hospital.**
 - a. Perinatal care providers and hospitals will provide continuous training and education on safe sleep, as well as patient education tools that can be administered easily and effectively, without overburdening the healthcare providers.
 - b. All delivering Kern County hospitals will develop an infant safe sleep policy that incorporates the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations. The policy should include regular training of staff, education for parents on safe sleep practices, modeling of safe sleep practices, community and media outreach, and periodic audits of infant sleep practices in the facility. Ideally, the policy should also include a mechanism for providing safe sleep environments (pack-n-plays, baby boxes) to every family that needs a safe place for their baby to sleep upon discharge.
 - c. Use communication measures as an effective route to reach community residents including collaborating with local news stations who are interested in spreading awareness.
 - d. Kern County Network for Children will continue to sponsor a robust Safe Sleeping Awareness Month campaign held annually in October. The campaign shall include press releases, social media marketing, training for community outreach workers, and additional creative media presentations.
 - e. The Safer Sleeping Education Project is an ongoing program within Kern County Public Health in which high-risk families, as well as home childcare providers, receive SIDS prevention education and a voucher for a safe-sleep crib and are followed up to assess compliance. CDRT has directly supported this effort by using CCFSS stipends to purchase portable crib vouchers for the program.
 - f. Provide support to the Kern County Safe Sleep Coalition whose mission is to present universal messaging and education on providing a safe sleep environment for infants.
 - g. Annually facilitate the Safe Baby, Safe Child Conference for healthcare and daycare providers in Kern County, ensuring awareness and invitations be distributed widely throughout the county. A main topic of the conference every year should focus on safe sleep information and training.
 - h. Promotion of safe infant sleep practices in pediatricians' offices. Promotion can include direct parent/caregiver education, educational materials availability, and referral to resources to obtain a safe sleeping environment such as a portable crib.
 - i. Increase outreach efforts that focus on parents of Black children and their communities. Create programs to gain the trust of this population to help reduce the child death rate found in the population.

 - 2. Decrease the incidence of child suicide by 20% within 5 years through supporting efforts that address suicide among children through raising community awareness, conveying strategies for identifying signs of self-harm, and developing resources for those at risk of suicide.**
 - a. Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services will continue to provide outreach to schools, DHS, Probation, and other child serving partners to raise awareness of the issue, provide stress-reduction strategies for children and adolescents, and to connect to needed resources relating to mental health issues.
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- b. Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services has implemented Zero Suicide and will continue to expand implementation of zero suicide to other mental health providers as well as to inpatient behavioral health care hospitals and in emergency rooms.
- c. Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services will outreach to parents of adolescents and young children to decrease stigma associated with mental illness.
- d. Faith-based organizations offering adolescent support services will incorporate education on coping and suicide prevention.
- e. Increase healthcare provider awareness and knowledge of strategies to identify early signs of suicidal ideations and early interventions through trainings utilizing depression screenings and education about mental health issues and self-harm.
- f. Increase support for Bakersfield Police Department and Kern County Sheriff's Department programs addressing social media and bullying by promoting and participating in their efforts and activities.
- g. Support community efforts that promote and provide training on mental health first aid.
- h. Refer instances of self-harm identified through emergency medical intervention to KBHRS for trauma informed crisis care to family and youth including connection to ongoing treatment and support.

3. Reduce childhood drowning deaths by increasing community awareness of water safety and the potential drowning dangers of pools, the Kern River, and other bodies of water.

- a. Continue community outreach and promotion of the "Water Watchers" campaign through Kern County Public Health.
- b. Increase efforts for pediatrician offices to promote "Water Watchers" along with water safety education for parents of young children.
- c. Educate parents and caregivers of children about the importance of children possessing basic swimming skills necessary to recover from falling into a body of water.
- d. Educate parents and caregivers of children about the importance of receiving hands-only CPR training.
- e. Reinforce the need of caregivers to watch small children in and around all sources of water, including bathtubs and buckets.
- f. Dedicate more outreach and education to ZIP codes with more prevalent drowning incidences.

4. Increase all Kern County community agencies' awareness of signs of child abuse and neglect and promote resources that are available when abuse and/or neglect is suspected.

- a. Support agencies/organizations that provide safety net care to suspected neglected and abused children, as well as those agencies/organizations that provide preventive and treatment services to parents and caregivers at risk for abuse.
 - b. Increase outreach efforts that focus on parents of preschool age children, not just those children already in preschool, but those who are at home with caregivers where parents/caregivers and their children are isolated and "invisible." These parents and children may have little knowledge of community support and parenting tools that are available to them.
 - c. Provide child abuse and neglect awareness and prevention information, training announcements, and community resource information emails sent at least monthly to more than 2,000 community members and service providers throughout Kern County.
 - d. Hold monthly collaborative meetings with local service providers and community meetings providing presentations targeted at child abuse and neglect awareness and prevention.
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- e. Hold monthly training for service providers and community members related to issues that children and families at risk of experiencing child abuse and neglect struggle with, mandated reporter training, and strategies available to help strengthen families.
- f. Continue to provide KCNC's Differential Response (DR) countywide. DR is an effective research-based approach that allows Child Protective Services to respond differently to accepted reports of child abuse and neglect, based on such factors as the type and severity of the alleged maltreatment, number and sources of previous reports, and willingness of the family to participate in services. DR expands the ability of Child Protective Services by assisting families at the first signs of trouble.
- g. Kern County Public Health will enhance the County pre-hospital emergency medical services electronic patient care reporting system to include questions leading to the identification of suspected child abuse and or neglect. Training and ongoing usage of this form will help emergency response personnel to identify safety concerns for at-risk children.

5. The Safe Kids Kern Coalition will help agencies increase awareness of motor vehicle and pedestrian safety among adolescents.

- a. Support agencies/organizations that provide education to adolescents regarding the use of seat belts. The use of seat belts can reduce the tragic consequences of motor vehicle accidents.
- b. In coordination with the Public Health Education Team increase outreach efforts that focus on providing pedestrian safety education to school-age children and their parents regarding the use of crosswalks and how to make themselves more visible at night. Conduct and support pedestrian education programs at local schools.
- c. Identify areas of Kern with high prevalence of pedestrian/crosswalk deaths/accidents and address any infrastructure issues that exist in these areas.
- d. Increase car seat technician education training to include car seat check-up events, providing the community with resources.
- e. Provide education for community members to be educated on the importance of passenger safety and demonstrate the correct way to install car seats. Provide and promote information on the locations of certified car seat technicians who can educate parents and caregivers on how to properly install car seats.
- f. Support agencies/organizations to promote safe driving especially to parents and adolescents so that they understand the importance of knowing and following California's driving laws.
- g. Provide education on California driving laws to all families that obtain car seat education/check-ups.

6. Significantly increase community awareness and education regarding the dangers of fentanyl and the importance of the usage and availability of Narcan.

- a. Include fentanyl education in the annual Safe Baby, Safe Child Conference.
 - b. Ensure that Narcan is universally available, especially in situations where individuals know they or others will be using substances.
 - c. Promote awareness of community sites that offer Narcan.
 - d. Increase community Narcan training to reduce overdose deaths.
 - e. Increase awareness on the Good Samaritan law for bystanders to call 911, even if individuals were using substances themselves.
 - f. Promote awareness to properly dispose of expired and unused medications.
 - g. Equip staff who provide services in the field and/or interact with the public with Narcan.
 - h. Implement a multi-disciplinary fentanyl taskforce in Kern County.
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Online Resources

Website	Description
Bicycle Safety	
Bicycle Safety: Bike Safety Tips for Kids and Adults NHTSA	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Bike Safety
Bike Safe Kids Worldwide	Safe Kids Bicycle Safety
Child Abuse	
National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome - Home (dontshake.org)	National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome, support and education
Child Abuse Prevention Kern County Network for Children	Kern County Child Abuse Prevention Council Community Resources
Domestic Violence	
Domestic Violence Resources Kern County, CA - Department of Human Services (kcdhs.org)	KCDHS Domestic Violence Resources
Child Abuse Mandated Reporter Training (mandatedreporterca.com)	California Child Abuse Mandated Reporter Training
Domestic Violence Support The National Domestic Violence Hotline (thehotline.org)	National Domestic Violence Hotline
Family Justice Center Kern County, CA	Kern County District Attorney's Family Justice Center
Aspire News app	Allows victims of abuse to call for help at the touch of a button
Car / Pedestrian Safety	
Car Seat Safety - Kern County Public Health (kernpublichealth.com)	Car Seat facts, tips, and safety
Child Safety Seats (ca.gov)	California Highway Patrol - Child Safety Seats
Youth Programs and Services (ca.gov)	California Highway Patrol - Youth Programs and Services
Pedestrian Safety: Prevent Pedestrian Crashes NHTSA	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Pedestrian Safety
Home KidsandCars.org	How kids get hurt in and around cars, resources
https://www.safekids.org	Videos and activities for in and around the car
Fentanyl Education / Narcan Resources	
NARCAN-2023.pdf (kerncountylibrary.org)	Kern County Library Narcan Flier
Naloxone Distribution Project Behavioral Health & Recovery Services (kernbhhs.org)	Narcan FAQs, How to Obtain Narcan and Narcan training
Narcan - Kern County Public Health (kernpublichealth.com)	Narcan Resources
OPI Landing Page (ca.gov)	CDPH Overdose Prevention Initiative

Safe Infant Sleeping Resources	
Sleep Safety and Suffocation Safe Kids Worldwide	Videos and activities for sleep safety
Safe to Sleep® - Publications NICHD - Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (nih.gov)	Safe to Sleep Pub Ed Campaign led by NIH
First Candle: Committed to ending Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)	First Candle organization, education for caregivers and families

Suicide-Youth	
Youth at Risk - Centre for Suicide Prevention (suicideinfo.ca)	Centre for Suicide Prevention, Youth at Risk Guide
Kern Behavioral Health & Recovery Services (kernbhhrs.org)	Crisis intervention/suicide prevention
The Trevor Project For Young LGBTQ Lives	Support for LGBTQ young people
Water Safety	
Pool Safely	National public education campaign to reduce child drownings
Water Watchers - Kern County Public Health (kernpublichealth.com)	Drowning prevention website, water play supervision