

# Heavy smoking linked to unexplained stroke in young adults, in men and ages 45-49

By LIBERTY GILBERT & MELISSA PATRICK  
*Kentucky Health News*

A recent study finds that people under the age of 50 who smoke heavily have a higher risk of experiencing an unexplained stroke.

The study, published in *Neurology*, found that this was particularly true in men and people in the 45-49-year-old age group.

“Our findings suggest that continued public health efforts around preventing smoking, especially heavy smoking, may be an important way to help reduce the number of strokes happening to young people,” lead author Phillip Ferdinand, a researcher at Keele University in the United Kingdom and a member of the American Academy of Neurology, said in a news release. The study looked at 546 people between the ages of 18 and 49 who had had an unexplained stroke. This group was then matched for age and gender with 546 people who did not have a stroke.

A stroke occurs “when a blood vessel carrying oxygen and nutrients to the brain is blocked by a clot (ischemic stroke) or bursts (hemorrhagic stroke). When an artery is blocked, the brain can’t get the blood and oxygen it needs. Brain cells can die from the lack of blood and oxygen,” according to UK HealthCare. Unexplained strokes are called cryptogenic strokes, which are a type of ischemic stroke caused by a blockage of blood flow, but it is unclear what has caused the blockage, says the release.

The researchers found that people who had an unexplained stroke were more likely to smoke. Of those with unexplained stroke, 33% smoked compared to 15% of those who didn’t have a stroke, according to the release.

After adjusting for factors that could affect the risk of stroke, the researchers found that people who smoked had more than twice the risk of having an

unexplained stroke when compared to those who did not smoke. They also found the risk was highest in male participants who had more than three times the risk, and also in people ages 45 to 49 who had nearly four times the risk.

The researchers also looked at how many cigarettes, pipes or cigars a person smoked a day and found that people who smoked the equivalent of more than 20 packs a year had more than four times the risk of unexplained stroke compared to those who did not smoke.

“This risk was especially high in male participants with nearly seven times the risk, and in people ages 45 to 49 who had nearly five times the risk,” according to the release.

The release notes that a limitation of the study is that it primarily looked at people of white European backgrounds, so the results may not be the same for other populations. However, Healthline reports that the results echo similar findings linking stroke risk with smoking.

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in Kentucky, according to the Kentucky Stroke Encounter Quality Improvement Project’s 2024 annual report. The counties with the highest number of patient records in the 2023 SEIQIP registry are Letcher, Johnson, Floyd, Pulaski and Harlan counties.

According to the 2021 Kentucky Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, about 4.9% of Kentucky adults have been told by their doctor that they had a stroke. This rate was similar by gender and by race, but significantly increased with age, with the highest prevalence of stroke in adults aged 65 and older (10.5%).

The state Department for Public Health offers a service called Quit Now Kentucky to help Kentuckians of all ages quit smoking. To learn more, go to [QuitNowKentucky.org](http://QuitNowKentucky.org), text QUITKY to 797979 or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

# MCC wins national award for helping coal workers retool for new jobs

By: KENTUCKY LANTERN STAFF  
*The Kentucky Lantern*

Madisonville Community College’s (MCC) efforts to prepare displaced coal industry workers for new jobs has won a national award.

The Bellwether Award recognizes innovative and impactful programs that drive student success and economic growth, says a news release from the Kentucky Communi-

ty and Technical College System.

The college converted a building at the former Dotiki mine portal in Webster County into the Lisman Workforce Complex, a training center for “in-demand technical careers,” the release says.

Recognizing a regional shortage of local utility line workers and those with commercial driver’s license certification (CDL), the college opened enrollment

to more students in both programs when classes began at the complex in 2022 and soon followed with a diesel technology program.

Partners include the Webster County Fiscal Court, Webster County Judge Executive Steve Henry and the Green River Area Development District, says the release.

Since 2019, the utility line technician program has grown by 68%, the release says, while grad-

uates from the Lisman Workforce Complex achieve more than a 93% placement rate in their professions within six months of completion.

The Bellwether College Consortium also recognized Madisonville Community College for its project aimed at bridging gaps in skilled trades as a finalist in the instructional programs and services category.

# Youth gun deaths in the US have increased by 50% since 2019

By AMANDA HERMANDEZ  
*The Kentucky Lantern*

Firearm-related deaths among children and teenagers in the United States have risen sharply in recent years, increasing by 50% since 2019.

In 2023, firearms remained the leading cause of death among American youth for the third year in a row, followed by motor vehicle accidents, according to the latest mortality data released by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The data shows 2,581 children aged 17 and under died from firearm-related incidents in 2023, including accidents, homicides and suicides, with a national rate of nearly four gun deaths per 100,000 children.”

Young people in the United States were killed by firearms at a rate near-

ly three times higher than by drowning. This means that for every child who died from drowning in 2023, nearly three died from gun violence.

“Every single number is a life lost — is a kid that won’t go back home,” said Silvia Villarreal, the director of research translation at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Gun Violence Solutions. Children, she added, are an inherently vulnerable population, and this vulnerability is even more pronounced among children of color.

Black children and teens in 2023 were more than eight times as likely to die from firearm homicide than their white peers. Since 2015, firearms have been the leading cause of death for Black youth, according to CDC data.

Since 2018, firearm

suicide rates have been highest among American Indian or Alaska Native and white children and teens. In 2023, American Indian and Alaska Native youth had the highest firearm suicide rate of any racial group.

Youth gun deaths don’t just affect family members, close loved ones and friends; they ripple through entire communities, making it difficult for people to heal, Villarreal told Stateline. “Communities that have suffered really high-impact losses are never the same, and I don’t know if it’s possible to be ever the same as it was before,” Villarreal said.

of the major policies championed by gun control and safety groups to address youth gun violence is safe storage laws, which establish guidelines for how firearms should be stored in

homes, vehicles and other properties. In recent years, some states also have proposed and adopted measures to create tax credits for purchasing gun safes. Twenty-six states have child access prevention and secure storage laws on the books, according to Everytown for Gun Safety, a gun control research and advocacy group.

A report released in July by RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, found that laws designed to limit children’s access to stored firearms may help reduce firearm suicides, unintentional shootings and firearm homicides among youth. This year, lawmakers in states across the country — including in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin — have considered gun storage policies.

# Beshear vetoes conversion therapy bill

Fulfilling a promise he made at this year’s Fairness Rally, Gov. Andy Beshear has vetoed a bill that would cancel his administration’s restrictions on conversion therapy and prohibit Medicaid from covering transgender-affirming medical care. The Republican-controlled legislature reconvenes on Thursday for the last two days of the 2025 legislative session, at which time lawmakers can eas-

ily override Beshear’s veto.

In his veto letter, Beshear called House Bill 495 an “unconstitutional infringement” that “promotes a dangerous and discriminatory practice that has led to the deaths of Kentucky children.”

Conversion therapy is a discredited practice that attempts to alter gender expression and sexual attraction that diverges from heterosexu-

al normativity “with the specific aim to promote heterosexuality as a preferable outcome,” according to the The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.”

In 2024, Beshear signed an executive order aimed at ending the practice on Kentucky minors. “Conversion therapy has no basis in medicine or science and causes significant long term damage to our kids, including increased rates

of suicide, anxiety and depression,” he wrote in his message on HB 495. “As leaders and policy makers, we should be in the business of protecting our citizens and kids from harm, not subjecting them to discredited methods that jeopardize their health, well being and safety.”

Beshear’s veto message did not mention the bill’s ban on Medicaid covering gender-affirming medical care.

## How to contact your elected officials:

**U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell**  
241 E. Main Street, Rm. 102  
Bowling Green, KY 42101  
270-781-167

**U.S. Sen. Rand Paul**  
1029 State Street  
Bowling Green, KY 42101  
270-782-8303

**U.S. Rep. Brett Guthrie**  
996 Wilkinson Trace, Suite B2  
Bowling Green, KY 42103  
270-842-9896

**Gov. Andy Beshear**  
700 Capitol Ave., Suite 100  
Frankfort, KY 40601

502-564-2611

**State Sen. Craig Richardson**  
702 Capital Ave., Annex Room 228  
Frankfort, KY 40601  
502-564-8100

**State Rep. Rebecca Raymer**  
702 Capital Ave., Annex Room 329G

Frankfort, KY 40601  
502-564-8100  
**Muhlenberg County Fiscal Court**  
Judge/Executive Mack McGehee  
P.O. Box 137  
Greenville, KY 42345  
270-338-2520

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Published every Tuesday by the Andy Anderson Corporation  
Periodical Postage Paid at Greenville, KY 42345  
USPS 229-260

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Leader-News, P.O. Box 138 Greenville, KY 42345

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