Kent – 8U



Members of Coach Jeremy Kent's 2026 8U Youth Football team. Players include Zaine Baker, Asa Brown, Carson Cochran, Jordyn Dean, Levi Emerson, Spencer Fulkerson, Gunner Hamilton, Nolin Kent, Maggie Myatt and Asher Rice.

Nall – 8U



Members of Coach Eddy Nall and Coach DW Cruse's 2026 8U Youth Football team. Players include Easton Allen, Allister Couch, Tad Cruse, William Elmore, Brayden Holbert, Anthony Lisk, Darwen Maddox, Kash Nall and Desmond Riggs.

Legislators hear about efforts to reduce teen driver fatalities

Legislators on the Interim Joint Committee on Transportation received updates last week from experts with the Kentucky Transportation Center regarding teen driving safety.

The federally mandated Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) – approved for 2025 through 2029 – is an umbrella plan that coordinates transportation safety funding activities across the commonwealth.

Reginald Souleyrette, principal investigator from the Kentucky Transportation Center, said the plan looks to improve highway safety across all categories of crashes and for all populations.

"We are passionate about improving safety for teen drivers," he said.

The SHSP uses data-driven analytics to identify the behavioral and environmental factors associated with severe crashes.

Benjamin Blandford from the transportation center said Kentucky averages between 700 and 800 fatalities a year, and their team has an ambitious goal to reduce that number to under 500 per year by 2029.

"If we were able to achieve that by 2029, that would mark the lowest number of fatalities annually in Kentucky since at least the 1960s," Blandford said.

According to numbers presented on Monday, Nov. 9 from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, fatal crash rates for drivers ages 16 and 17 were three times higher in 2025 than drivers age 20 and over.

Currently, Kentucky has the fourth highest crash rate of young drivers aged 15 to 20, according to the testimony.

Preliminary research findings revealed that behavioral factors such as aggressive driving, distracted driving and impaired driving are major contributors to teen-involved crashes.

The findings also revealed improving data integration, expanding driver education resources, and improving driver training opportunities and procedures are the evidenced-based solutions to improving driver safety in Kentucky.

Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, noted that all of Kentucky's surrounding states have lower crash rates. He attributed this to those states having enacted hands-free bills, whereas Kentucky has not.

Preliminary analysis presented to legislators involved Kentucky crash rates from 2016 to 2025 specifically looking at changes before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other behavioral factors.

"We had an increase in these fatalities post-pandemic," said Rep. John Blanton, R-Salyersville. "Do you have any idea or theory behind what happened that caused that increase so dramatically after the pandemic?"

Blandford noted that the average speed of drivers has gone up since the pandemic. He also said that fatality rates have gone up for all drivers nationwide but there is not one definitive reason for the increase.

Sen. Phillip Wheeler, R-Pikeville, asked if studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of lowering the age for learning permits to 15.

"There have been some results from other states that have lowered the driving age to indicate that extra experience can be helpful," Souleyrette said. "We have not done such an analysis in Kentucky."

Rep. Myron Dossett, R-Pembroke, asked if the researchers have investigated the impact of driver's education courses in high schools, and said "It's a great opportunity to help those young people learn, and plus save on their insurance premiums as well."

Caitlin A. Northcutt from the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center said that is not something officials have looked at yet. However, a new project will look at different counties in Kentucky and the resources they provide.

Northcutt said that quality and quantity matters in driver training and "driver's education can definitely help set a standard for the quality."

In 2025, House Bill 15 took effect, reducing the minimum age for getting a learner's permit in Kentucky from 16 to 15 years old.

Higdon said he "was concerned about it when we passed it, but it seems like it's working out very well."

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