Google's AI Search poses unacceptable risk to kids, Common Sense Media finds

Submitted by Cision

SAN FRANCISCO (July 15, 2026) — Common Sense Media's Youth AI Safety Institute today released a comprehensive risk assessment of the AI features built into Google Search that finds they pose unacceptable risks to children. Google's AI Overview and AI Mode repeatedly missed signs of kids in crisis, gave inappropriate advice, and produced answers that were inaccurate and unreliable for young learners.

Unlike Google's standalone Gemini chatbot, schools and parents can't turn off Google Search's AI answers. That's deeply concerning, because Google is the default search engine on phones and laptops, and fundamental to how kids experience the internet. Earlier this year, Common Sense Media's survey found that AI-generated summaries in search engine results are the most widely used form of AI among 9- to 17-year-olds, with 75% having used or interacted with them.

"What we found is a product that fails kids at the moments that matter most: It misses clear signs of a kid in crisis, validates disordered eating, celebrates substance use, completes homework on demand, and gives wrong answers as confidently as right ones," said Robbie Torney, Head of AI and Digital Assessments at the Youth AI Safety Institute. "A product this central to kids' lives, especially an unavoidable one, should be held to a higher standard, and Google isn't meeting it."

Researchers at the Youth AI Safety Institute conducted more than 2,600 searches using accounts configured with Google's SafeSearch for child and teen users ages 11 and 15. The Google AI Search risk assessment's key findings include:

Google's AI answers do not reliably detect or respond appropriately to kids at risk. It missed clear signs of suicidal ideation (sometimes answering in ways that made things worse), played into delusions and paranoia, and validated disordered eating. Some answers also recommended an eating disorder helpline that was permanently disconnected in 2023.

AI Mode completes kids' homework assignments for them every time. It produced full answers to 180 assignments we tested, doing the work kids need to tackle themselves in order to learn. Because AI Mode is built into school-issued laptops, students can route any assignment through an AI shortcut, and schools have no setting to stop them.

Google's AI answers are unreliable. It answered more than 4 in 10 history questions substantially differently from one search to the next. More than a quarter of the citations they produced came from forums and social posts with no editorial accountability, but they were displayed with the same authority as peer-reviewed research.

"Every parent should be deeply troubled by these findings," said Youth AI Safety Institute board of advisors member John King Jr., chancellor of the State University of New York and former United States Secretary of Education. "What we're seeing is threats to children's emotional safety, threats to their mental health, and threats to their ability to learn."

The Youth AI Safety Institute recommends Google turn off AI Search features by default for accounts that belong to minors, and give schools and families controls for those features that don't exist today. It also recommends Google standardize its crisis responses to queries about suicide, self-harm, and eating disorders.

Common Sense Media recommends that parents and caregivers teach kids that AI answers are often wrong. It also encourages educators to incorporate digital literacy lessons for students of all ages.

For more about how Google's AI Search is failing kids, read this article. See the full Google AI Search risk evaluation here.

About the Youth AI Safety Institute and Common Sense Media

The Youth AI Safety Institute sets standards, conducts research, and independently tests the AI products children use most. It's part of Common Sense Media, the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the research-backed information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the age of apps, algorithms, and AI. We rate, educate, and advocate to protect and prepare kids online. Our ratings, research, and resources reach more than 150 million users globally, over 1.5 million educators, and more than 100,000 schools worldwide every year.

The Youth AI Safety Institute is funded by both philanthropy and industry, including the makers of some of the technologies it evaluates. The Institute is solely responsible for its standards, research, and evaluations, and maintains complete editorial independence over published results.

The AI Overview and AI Mode built into Google Search are not safe enough to be kids' default source of answers and, concerningly, the features can't be turned off.

Looking back to July 16, 2018

Written by Christy Hoots

The following information was entered into the July 16, 2018, edition of The Ledger Independent:

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EarthJoy listed as best unique place to stay

GERMANTOWN — A local hideaway in the woods of Germantown has been named one of the best unique places to stay in Bracken Country by gobourbon.com

The EarthJoy Treehouse Adventures, owned and operated by Shelly and Bill Byrnes, offers guests a chance to stay in a semi-secluded treehouse and enjoy all nature has to offer, while still remaining close to town. Guests can book the treehouses on AirBnB year round.

According to the gobourbon.com website, EarthJoy was chosen because of the unique experience it offers to guests and the closeness one of the future stops on the B-line trail.

"While this may not seem like the traditional place to find the Bourbon lifestyle, we loved the unique feel of these hand-built treehouses. Featured on Treehouse Masters, these Germantown properties offer you the opportunity to hang outdoors and earn your booze climbing their many routes. Bring your own Bourbon to share later in the day as you enjoy the sunset from the treetops," the website said.

Shelly Byrnes said she was happy to find out about being named one of the best places to stay.

"We were ecstatic," she said. "The woman in charge let us know (Thursday) and we felt honored and that all of our hard work was being recognized. We felt appreciated."

According the Shelly Byrnes, there are two cabins on the property. One is the Pete Nelson cabin, constructed in 2015 as a part of the Treehouse Masters television show.

Inside the treehouse is a loft, a couch and a kitchen. There is a hammock beneath the treehouse. A compost bathroom is just outside, but bathhouses are also nearby.

The second treehouse, named Aliyah after the Byrnes' 2-year-old daughter, features an even more unique experience. The treehouse has a loft on the inside of the main area, with a couch, a kitchen and a couch wrapped around the tree. There is a patio with a swinging bridge to the "snuggle cabin," which features a set of bunk beds and a sliding glass door.

Photo by Christy Hoots

EarthJoy Treehouse Adventures was recently listed as one of the best, unique places to stay in Bracken Country.

The property originally offered tree climbing adventures, but they later decided to build a place for guests to stay on site.

"The big break came when we decided to build a treehouse. It took off from there. People wanted to climb trees and come to the workshops. It's a world of adventure in one place," she said. "They can come fish, camp, walk the trails."

According to Shelly Byrnes, each walking trail has a different theme. Guests can also complete different climbing activities and workshops, including a treehouse mini-retreat for women, rescue/facilitation certification, tree climbing certification, a primitive skills workshop, a couples workshop and a mother/daughter mini-retreat.

Couples can even get married on the property.

"I've conducted weddings right there on the patio of the Pete Nelson treehouse," Shelly Byrnes said.

If it rains, guests are still encouraged to go out and explore the area.

"Go down to the creek or get out your umbrella and hike the trails, splash around in the mud," she said. "Rain is a part of the nature."

Even though bourbon is not available on the property, Shelly Byrnes said she looks forward to having guests visiting the B-Line trail.

"We have information in the treehouses for some of our guests favorite places to visit in the area," she said. "There's a lot to see. People can visit Maysville, go to the restaurants, the coffee shops or visit Augusta. There's a lot to see and do. We want guests to have a fun and unique experience here."

The treehouses are on private property and unavailable to visit without an appointment.

More information on the treehouses can be found at http://climbtreeswithearthjoy.com or https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/20524532.

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