

	UNITED STATES			KENTUCKY		
HEALTH				SCORE	RANK	
				556	31	
				BETTER		
Low birth-weight babies US 308,966 KY 4,640	8.3% 2019	8.5% 2024	↑ WORSE	8.7% 2019	8.8% 2024	↑ WORSE
Children without health insurance US 4,648,000 KY 54,000	6% 2019	6% 2024	STABLE	4% 2019	5% 2024	↑ WORSE
Child and teen deaths per 100,000 US 21,189 KY 335	25 2019	27 2024	↑ WORSE	29 2019	31 2024	↑ WORSE
Children and teens (ages 10 to 17) who are overweight or obese US N.A. KY N.A.	31% 2018-19	30% 2023-24	↓ BETTER	37% 2018-19	33% 2023-24	↓ BETTER

Kentucky Health News

Kentucky makes little progress in Kids County survey

BY MELISSA PATRICK
KENTUCKY HEALTH NEWS

Kentucky's youth showed improvement in only one of the four categories the annual Kids Count Data Book measures to determine health: the percentage of children and teens who are overweight or obese.

This category showed a decrease in the percentage of the state's children and teens who were either overweight or obese, down to 33% in 2023-24, from 37% in 2018-19.

Otherwise, the state saw increases in the other three health measures.

Kentucky saw a slight increase in its percentage of low birth-weight babies, from 8.7% in 2019 to 8.8% in 2024; an increase in the percentage of children without health insurance, from 4% in 2019 to 5% in 2024; and an increase in child and teen deaths per 100,000, increasing to 31 in 2024 from 29 in 2019.

And even though it is part of the family and community category, it's important to note that teen birth rates in Kentucky dropped to 20 teen births per 1,000 in 2024, from 25 teen births per 1,000 in 2019.

Kids Count ranked Kentucky

31st among states for health.

The 2026 Kids Count Data Book was released Monday, June 8, by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The annual report looks at indicators of children's well-being in four categories: education, health, economic success and community and family.

This year's report, which compares data from before the pandemic to the latest available figures, largely 2019 and 2024, ranks Kentucky 36th in child well-being — the same as last year.

A news release notes that "while progress was made on eight of the 16 indicators over five years in Kentucky, the data shows sustained challenges driven by factors such as a crisis in educational outcomes, an increase in child deaths, a drop in health insurance coverage after pandemic-era enhancements ended, and a high housing cost burden among families."

"Behind every number in this report is a Kentucky kid who is either hungry or fed, housed or homeless, progressing academically or falling behind," Shannon Moody, the incoming executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, said in the

release. "The annual Data Book provides a crucial reality check on how children are faring and challenges elected officials, advocates, and other caring Kentuckians to focus in on where policy change or investment really is needed."

States received a comprehensive score (from 0 to 1,000) in the Data Book, aimed at showing whether public policies and investments are actually improving children's lives, not merely how states compare to each other.

Kentucky received a score of 498, below the national score of 547 and yet an improvement from 465 in 2019, with the greatest improvements in the family and community domain.

Other trends and key takeaways:

While the percentage of children in poverty has decreased by 14% in this timeframe, Kentucky ranks in the bottom 10 relative to other states, and nearly one in five (19%) children live in families with an income below the federal poverty line.

Ranking 11th in the nation, the percentage of children in households burdened by high housing costs remained stagnant at 23% despite ongoing efforts by advocates and policymakers to improve

housing affordability and access across the commonwealth.

Education is Kentucky's strongest domain in comparison to other states, ranking second in the rate of high school student graduation and 10th in fourth-grade reading proficiency. Yet, two-thirds of fourth graders scored below proficient reading levels and more than three in four eighth graders scored below proficient math scores in 2024 — both worse than scores in 2019.

The child and teen death rate remains an area of concern as the rate increased from 29 deaths per 100,000 children in 2019 to 31 deaths per 100,000 children, with state data citing growing trends in deaths by accidental ingestions or overdose and by suicide as the result of a firearm. The commonwealth now ranks 30th in the nation for this indicator.

Kentucky has had a consistent rate of 96% or more of children with health insurance since 2015, with a slight increase to 97% in 2023 due to ongoing pandemic-era healthcare policies. Then in 2024, the commonwealth saw a jump in children without health coverage compared to 2019, lowering the coverage rate to 95%.

The percentage of children and teens ages 10 to 17 who are overweight or obese decreased from 37% in 2018-2019 to 33% in 2023-2024 — a promising improvement, though Kentucky ranks among the bottom 10 states in this indicator.

While still ranking among the worst five states in the nation, the teen birth rate in Kentucky decreased by 20% from 2019 to 2024 — mirroring the decrease nationwide.

"Kids don't grow up in siloed systems — they are impacted by the homes they live in, the schools they learn at, the foods they consume, the relationships they build within their communities, and the leaders who represent them in Frankfort and D.C.," Terry Brooks, retiring executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, said in the release. "Unless and until we begin to address solutions for the nearly 200,000 Kentucky young people waking up every day in dire straits, then we are simply passing the buck. Proven and bipartisan solutions are achievable as early as the 2027 legislative session — and acting on those ideas can bring us ever closer to that day when Kentucky is the best place in America to be young."

Dig and divide daffodils

If your daffodils didn't bloom well this year, ask yourself these two questions: did you allow the foliage to die back naturally last summer before you cut it off, and has it been eons since they were last divided?

Patience is a virtue when it comes to daffodils. Often the first color to appear in early spring, their beauty is long-awaited. Then we must wait another two months before we can remove the dulling green foliage. The foliage gathers nutrients for



JENEEN WICHE
IN MY GARDEN

the bulb to store over winter, allowing it to grow and bloom next spring. If you remove the foliage prematurely, you reduce the blooms for next year. Deadheading the spent blossoms will help prolong blooming and allow more nutrients to be absorbed by the bulb when the bloom cycle is complete.

If it has indeed been eons since you last divided your daffodil clumps, plan to do so when the foliage dies back naturally in mid-June. Daffodils can be divided every 5 to 7

years; and if you do it when the foliage is ready to be cut back at least you can easily locate what you want to dig!

Use a garden fork to pop up your bulbs. A garden fork is less likely to sever the bulbs in half and helps to loosen the soil around the bulbs. Once the bulbs are out of the ground, clean them off and then check them over. Discard any bulbs that are soft, bruised or punctured, if the case may be. Pretend you are selecting onions from the grocery store. Any damage means that they are more likely to rot. Break apart the loosely attached "baby" bulbs,

leaving those that are firmly attached to the mother bulb. These larger bulbs will produce more blooms next spring. The baby bulbs will need a year to grow.

It is best, and more convenient, to replant your bulbs right away. This way, you do not need to worry about curing and storing them properly until fall planting. I like to plant clusters of large and small bulbs, so the smaller non-flowering bulbs are not so noticeable. Or plant the smallest bulbs in an area where they can mature for a year and then move them where they can be enjoyed.

A well-drained environment is essential to growing healthy daffodils, or else they may rot. To prepare your planting area, dig down about 10 inches so you can add a special concoction to ensure good drainage. The legendary Helen Trueblood, a Southern Indiana daffodil aficionado, called it "chomp" because she added perlite, river gravel, sand, compost and calcium enriched bulb-boosting fertilizer (low in nitrogen) and then "chomps" it all together. Drop your bulb in and cover it with a light soil and compost mixture

and water.

Plant bulbs at a depth of about 2 to 3 times their diameter, and about 4 to 8 inches apart. Choose a site that will camouflage the foliage after blooming is complete. Ground cover beds in your landscape are ideal because the ground cover helps to maintain soil moisture and the foliage is not as noticeable against the green backdrop. Keep in mind that they will not always nod their heads towards you and your vantage point, daffodil blooms nod their heads towards the sun so plant them with any shade coming from behind the bed.

