

Simple habits that support a healthier heart

BY DR. NOURAN SOROUR
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
KENTUCKY HEALTH NEWS

February is American Heart Month, a reminder that heart health is built through the small, everyday choices we make. Many heart disease risk factors can be reduced through healthy habits. This Heart Month, focus on realistic, sustainable steps that support a stronger heart for you and your family.

- Eat smart for a healthy heart
- Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables.
- Choose whole grains over refined grains.
- Swap sugary drinks for water or unsweetened beverages.
- Limit processed foods high in sodium and saturated fats.
- Include heart-healthy fats like avocado, nuts and olive oil.
- Add more movement to your routine
- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week.



Photo submitted

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Add in family walks after dinner.
- Incorporate strength training twice a week.
- Daily choices that strengthen heart health
- Get seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- Manage stress with mindfulness, yoga or meditation.
- Avoid smoking and limit alcohol intake.
- Schedule routine check-ups with your health care provider.
- Healthy habits start at home
- When parents stay active, kids are more likely to build

healthy heart habits.

- Limiting screen time and encouraging active play support balanced, heart-healthy routines.
- Eating meals together supports healthier food choices and long-term nutrition habits.
- Consistent bedtimes help kids regulate sleep, improve focus, mood and heart health.
- Women and heart disease
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women, yet it is often under-recognized.
- Women may experience symptoms such as shortness of breath, fatigue, nausea or jaw/back pain, not just chest pain.
- Risk increases after menopause.
- Pregnancy-related conditions like high blood pressure or gestational diabetes raise future heart risk.
- Make heart-healthy habits part of your life
- Start small: Add one new habit each week.
- Plan ahead: Prep healthy

food in advance for easy snacking and meals.

- Make it social: Do physical activity or cook heart-healthy meals together as a family.
 - Set reminders: Set phone alerts for hydration, movement and bedtime.
 - Track progress: Keep a journal or use an app to monitor exercise, meals and sleep.
 - Celebrate wins: Track progress and celebrate milestones.
- As a cardiologist, I often remind patients that heart health is a lifelong investment. The small, consistent decisions we make each day determine our long-term cardiovascular future. This American Heart Month, commit to one meaningful habit and let it be the start of lasting change.
- This week's column is by Dr. Nouran Sorour, associate professor of internal medicine in the UK College of Medicine and cardiologist at UK HealthCare's Gill Heart & Vascular Institute.

Health bills advance at 2026 session midpoint, stall in other chamber

BY MELISSA PATRICK
KENTUCKY HEALTH NEWS

Health bills are still moving in week seven of the 2026 legislative session, but aren't seeing much movement once they pass over to the opposite chamber for consideration. Week seven marks the midpoint of the 60-day session.

Here are some of the health bills that saw action last week:

Diabetes – House Bill 141, sponsored by Rep. Derek Lewis, R-London, would create guidelines for the Department of Education to develop high-quality Type 1 diabetes informational materials for parents and guardians of students. It passed out of the House Standing Committee on Primary and Secondary Education with a committee substitute on Wednesday, Feb. 18, and is posted for passage in the House Regular Orders of the Day.

Addictive Online Platforms – HB 227, sponsored by Rep. Matt Lockett, R-Nicholasville, would require social media platforms to limit features designed to keep minors engaged for extended periods, such as auto-scrolling and algorithm-driven recommendations. It also would call on platforms to use existing age-verification methods to ensure parental consent is provided. The House Committee on Small Business and Information Technology moved the bill forward on Wednesday, Feb. 18. It now resides in the full House.

Artificial Intelligence and therapy – HB 455, sponsored by Rep. Kim Banta, R-Ft. Mitchell, would restrict the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by certain licensed professionals in therapy and psychotherapy services, including but not limited to licensed psychologists and licensed clinical social workers. The bill passed out of the House Standing Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations with a committee substitute on Wednesday, Feb. 18, and is posted for passage in the House Regular Orders of the Day.



Edward Crim

THE KENTUCKY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Mental Health Care – HB 485, sponsored by House Majority Whip Jason Nemes, R-Middletown, and co-sponsored by chair of the House Health Services Committee Kim Moser, R-Taylor Mill, would change procedures for involuntary hospitalization and care of individuals with mental illness. The bill passed out of the House with a committee substitute and two floor amendments on Thursday, Feb. 19, 95-0. It now resides in the Senate for consideration.

First responders' mental health – HB 486, sponsored by Rep. Bill Wesley, R-Ravenna, would allow rescue squad members to participate in the Alan "Chip" Terry Professional Development and Wellness Program. The bill passed out of the Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection Committee on Tuesday, Feb. 17. It now resides in the full House for consideration.

Organ Donors – HB 510, sponsored by Rep. Nemes, would require additional verification steps before organ procurement can begin. It would also clarify that donor consent must be properly documented and that a patient must be formally declared dead before organs are donated. The House Health Services Committee advanced the bill on Thursday, Feb. 19. It now resides in the full House for consideration.

Autism Trust Fund – SB 69, sponsored by Sen. Julie Raque Adams, R-Louisville, would create an autism

spectrum disorder trust fund administered by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. It would allow individuals to donate their tax refunds to support research and support services. The fund could also accept grants, appropriations, and other types of contributions. The bill passed out of the Senate on Tuesday, Feb. 17, 37-0. It now resides in the House for consideration.

Youth vaping prevention – SB 74, sponsored by Sen. Craig Richardson, R-Hopkinsville, would ensure settlement funds received by the commonwealth from vaping manufacturer Juul Labs are dedicated specifically to youth vaping prevention and cessation efforts. The money currently goes to the General Fund. The bill passed out of the Senate Health Services committee with a committee substitute on Wednesday, Feb. 18. The next day, the Senate Rules Committee recommitted the bill to the Senate Appropriations & Revenue Committee.

Substance use disorder – Senate Joint Resolution 74, sponsored by Sen. Brandon Storm, R-London, would direct the Legislative Research Commission and state agencies to create a statewide fiscal map of substance use disorder programs and funding sources to support better policy, budgeting and accountability. The Senate voted in favor of the bill on Thursday, Feb. 19, 38-0. It now resides in the House for consideration.

Kentucky children keep dying in 'preventable' drug overdoses

BY SARAH LADD
KENTUCKY LANTERN
KENTUCKY HEALTH NEWS

Kentucky children are increasingly ingesting and overdosing on unsafe substances like cannabinoids and fentanyl, with the rate increasing by more than 100% in the last five years, a new report shows.

The annual report from Kentucky's Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel shows an increase in physical child abuse as well among the 72 child fatalities and 176 near fatalities in fiscal year 2024. The panel only reviews fatal and near-fatal cases. There were nearly 15,000 cases of child maltreatment in Kentucky in 2024, according to a federal report released in January.

Findings show a lack of parental and caregiver education around the dangers of routine medications as well as system failures, including packaging of cannabinoids that fails to adequately communicate the risks products pose to children, and mistakes made by the state in investigating allegations.

Dr. Christina Howard, a child abuse pediatrician and a member of the panel, said the ingestion and overdose cases investigated by the panel are "absolutely preventable."

While THC and medical cannabis products are available to adults, "we do know that they can be dangerous to children when they're accessed," Howard said. "And I think that's kind of what we want the general population to know: You ... have things in your home that are dangerous. Tylenol can be dangerous to kids. Making sure that those are stored in a way that children cannot access them is very important."

Packaging and marketing of these products also need improvement, she said. They need to clearly communicate to consumers that products that may look appealing to children, like a cannabis brownie, can seriously hurt them.

The Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel was created in 2012 to conduct comprehensive reviews of child deaths and serious injuries from abuse or neglect. The independent panel of physicians, judges, lawyers, police, legislators and social service and health professionals meets regularly to analyze such cases. It produces an annual report on its findings and recommendations for improvements.

KEY FINDINGS IN THE REPORT

The latest report, which is more than 100 pages, details findings based on incidents in the 2024 fiscal year, which was July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024. The findings include:

98 children ingested or overdosed on dangerous substances. The most



Toys for children who have survived abuse at the Family & Children's Place. Feb. 11, 2026. Kentucky Lantern photo by Sarah Ladd.

common substances in these cases were cannabinoids (28%), fentanyl (19%) and methamphetamine (16%).

11 children died from ingestion/overdoses. The report does not identify which substances killed the children. Nine children died from firearm injuries out of 11 cases of injury reviewed by the panel. The panel reviewed 12 in the previous report.

The rate of cannabinoid exposure to children in Kentucky has increased 720% in the last five years. In 2020, there were five cases of cannabinoid ingestion or overdose. In 2024, there were 41.

The majority of physical abuse cases (76%) were almost fatal for the child victim.

There was a 31% increase in physical abuse cases reviewed by the panel: 55 for fiscal year 2024, up from 42 the previous year.

Parental refusal of Vitamin K shots is "increasingly common, often due to disinformation on social media and misunderstanding the risks involved," the panel reported, calling this trend "alarming."

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, giving babies Vitamin K has been the "standard of care" to prevent vitamin K deficiency bleeding since the 1960s. When a baby doesn't have enough vitamin K in the blood, they may not be able to clot and, therefore, are unable to stop bleeding. This can lead to a life-threatening brain hemorrhage or death, according to the panel.

This shot usually happens in the delivery room, said Dr. Gerard Rabalais, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Louisville School of Medicine who co-chairs Kosair for Kids' Face It Committee. Increased parental refusal of this can be at least partially traced to general misinformation perpetrated on social media, he said.

"I think what you're seeing is the power of social media to influence people, where someone gets online and says something about, 'well, my kid got a vitamin K shot, and two months later, she had a seizure, and therefore, I'm telling everybody: don't get the vitamin K shot,'" he said. "There's no science to it, but the anecdote is enough to

scare people. Information is so readily available to people, but it doesn't come with wisdom, understanding or knowledge."

This spread of misinformation leads to "fear-based" decision-making, he said. Vitamin K is not a vaccine, and the nutrient is a safe and important defense against bleeding for babies, according to the Mayo Clinic.

THE 'MULTIFACTORIAL' ISSUES DRIVING CASES

Physical abuse cases investigated by the panel also often involved other issues, including involvement with the state Department for Community Based Services, financial issues, substance use, mental health issues, criminal history and domestic violence.

There are "multifactorial" issues driving these cases: "There's no one thing that leads to these problems — that's what makes it so hard to deal with," Rabalais said.

With the exception of firearm deaths, Rabalais said, death is preceded by an "escalating amount of violence."

"The problem with child fatality related to abuse and neglect is: It is not an all of a sudden thing," he said. "The three-month-old doesn't die having been perfectly normal for three months and then die of being abused and abusive head trauma. ... The vast majority of the physical and neglect abuse has telltale signs that are visible. Education around what those are is a big part of it."

Howard, with Golisano Children's at UK, said the state needs to recognize this data as an opportunity to make sure families have comprehensive support systems.

"I think at the end of the day, most parents want to be good parents; they just need the help to do it," she said. "We really need to continue to have broad support for families, whether that's for ... food insecurity, travel, I think transportation comes up a whole lot of times when we think about families that are having financial hardship. I think that making sure that families get the support that they need is always important, and we can't just presume that they're getting it."

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SCHEDULE

- Saturday, March 21 at Ballard - 1 p.m.
- Monday, March 23 vs. Fairdale AT HOME – 6 p.m.
- Thursday, March 26 at Bullitt East – 6 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 7 vs. Collins AT HOME – 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 8 at Collins – 6 p.m.
- Monday, April 13 vs. DuPont Manual AT HOME – 5:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 14 at North Bullitt – 5:30 p.m.
- Thursday, April 16 at Eastern – 5:30 p.m.
- Saturday, April 18 vs. Male AT HOME – 12 p.m.



- Tuesday, April 21 at Anderson County – 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 22 vs. Anderson County AT HOME – 6 p.m.
- Friday, April 24 at Oldham County – 6 p.m.
- Saturday, April 25 at Southern – 12 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 28 at Woodford County – 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 29 vs. Woodford County AT

- HOME – 6 p.m.
- Saturday, May 2 at Pleasure Ridge Park – 12 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 5 vs. Shelby County AT HOME – 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 6 at Shelby County – 6 p.m.
- Friday, May 8 vs. Atherton AT HOME – 5:30 p.m.
- Saturday, May 9 vs. LaRue County AT HOME – 12 p.m.
- Monday, May 11 vs. Christian Academy Louisville AT HOME – 5:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 12 vs. Nelson County AT HOME – 5:30 p.m.
- Thursday, May 14 vs. Bullitt East AT HOME – 6 p.m.
- Friday, May 15 vs. Southern AT HOME – 6 p.m.
- Schedule subject to change.
- Photos from last season by Jeff Sopland/The Spencer Magnet.