



The Cuyahoga County Child Fatality Report Child Fatalities 2021

Protecting Our Future

Executive Summary

This report includes highlights of the overall 2021 data and noteworthy changes compared to 2020. For a copy of the full report: <https://hhs.cuyahogacounty.us/departments/invest-in-children/child-fatality-review-board> or scan the QR code provided.



Overall Look at 2021

In 2021, there were 165 child deaths in Cuyahoga County; 13 more than in 2020 but tied with 2014 for the second-lowest total in the county’s history. The increase was due to 14 more deaths to children 1- to 9 years old and child deaths to 10- to 17 year olds increasing by three. The number of infant deaths (97) was the lowest in our county’s history.



- Prematurity, other medical causes and birth defects were the top three causes of child death. Sleep related deaths had the largest decrease (-6), while birth defects had the biggest increase in child deaths (+8).
- The Cuyahoga County infant mortality rate (IMR) of 7.4 per 1,000 live births and the Black non-Hispanic IMR (12.1) were the lowest in the county’s history.
- The Black non-Hispanic prematurity related mortality rate (6.1) was also the lowest in the county’s history.
- Infant unsafe sleep deaths were the third-lowest in the last 10 years.
- The number of deaths in the unintentional injury category was the highest in the last 10 years. The top three causes include suffocation from unsafe sleep, drowning, fire, and motor vehicle accidents.
- Drowning (5) and accidental fire (4) deaths were both at 10-year highs.
- Ten deaths due to suicide was also a 10-year high and tied with 2004 for the highest in the last 30 years.
- Gun-related deaths (14) was the highest in the last 10 years.

Table 1. Annual Number of Deaths by Age Group

Age Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Under 1 Year	131	133	121	155	128	118	120	120	101	97	1,224
1 - 9 Years	30	31	18	25	15	31	33	26	20	34	263
10 - 17 Years	21	22	26	20	29	39	32	28	31	34	282
Total	182	186	165	200	172	188	185	174	152	165	1,769

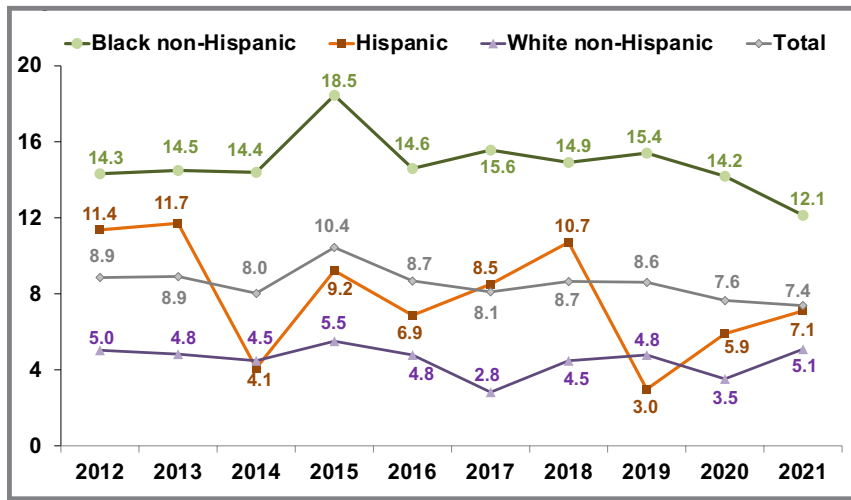
Child Fatality Review

The purpose of the Cuyahoga County Child Fatality Review Board is to decrease the number of preventable child deaths. The Board reviews the causes and risk factors of deaths for all children less than 18 years old. Recommendations are made to protect the health and safety of all children in the community. Board membership includes representatives from child service, hospital and governmental agencies.

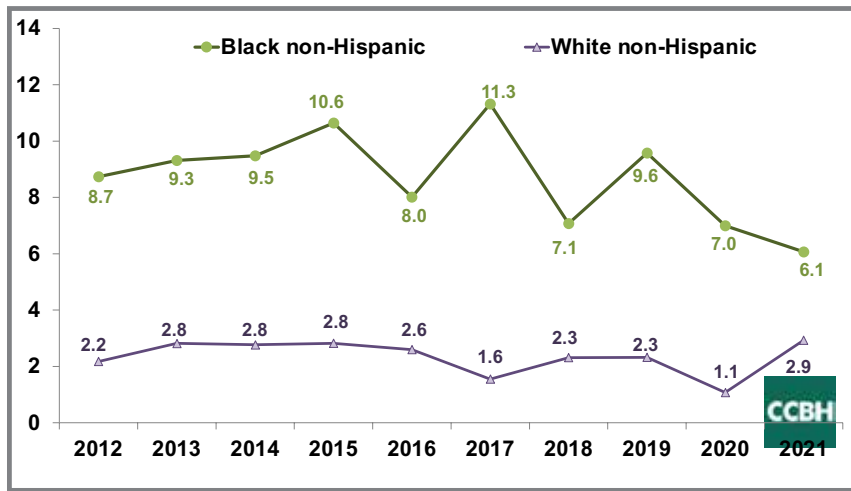
Infant Mortality

The fewest number of annual infant deaths in the county’s history resulted in the lowest IMR (7.4 per 1,000 live births) in 2021. For the first time since 2014, the majority of the infants that passed away lived in the suburbs.

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) per 1,000 Live Births



Rates of Infant Death Due to Prematurity by Race



Infant Mortality

- There were 97 infant deaths, 4 fewer than in 2020 and the fewest in the county’s history.

Racial Inequity

- The Black non-Hispanic IMR of 12.1 was two times higher than the White non-Hispanic rate of 5.1.
- The prematurity death rate for Black non-Hispanic infants was two times higher than the rate of the White non-Hispanic infants.

Prematurity

- 51 infants died due to premature birth, the second-lowest number in the county’s history.
- The Black non-Hispanic rate was the lowest in the last 10 years, while the White non-Hispanic rate was the highest in the last 10 years.

Sleep Related

- There were 17 sleep related infant deaths, the third-lowest total in the last 10 years.
- In the majority of sleep related deaths, there was low adherence to the ABCD safe sleep recommendations although most had a safe sleep location available.
- 14 deaths occurred while the infant was sleeping in an adult bed.

2021 Sleep Related (n=17) Demographics & Risk Factors

Sleep Related Demographics	
Neighborhood	Count
Cleveland	12
First Ring Suburbs	4
Outer Ring Suburbs	1
Infant’s Race	Count
Black non-Hispanic	14
Hispanic	1
White non-Hispanic	2

Adherence to ABCDs of Safe Sleep ^a		Count
A	Infant slept alone	6
B	Infant placed on back to sleep ^b	13
C	Crib or bassinet used ^b	3
D	Smoke free environment	4

^aABCD’s adherence data reflect self-reporting by caregivers, and is not always supported by medical examiner investigations.

^b One death had unknown sleep position and location information.

Unintentional Injury Related Deaths

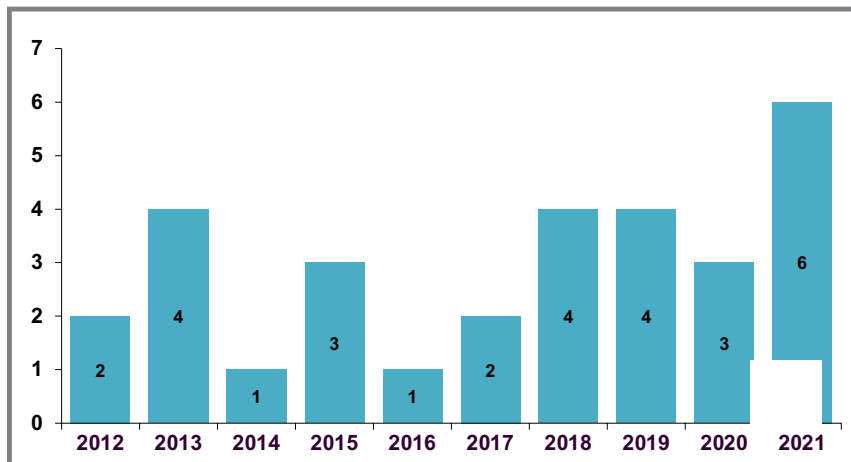
There were 35 unintentional injury child deaths in 2021, which was the highest in the last 10 years. Almost 55% of these deaths were due to accidental suffocation. Fourteen of the 19 accidental suffocation deaths were sleep related. Drowning, fire and motor vehicle accidents accounted for an additional 37% of these deaths. Drowning and fire deaths were the highest in the last 10 years.

2021 Unintentional Injury Deaths [n=35]

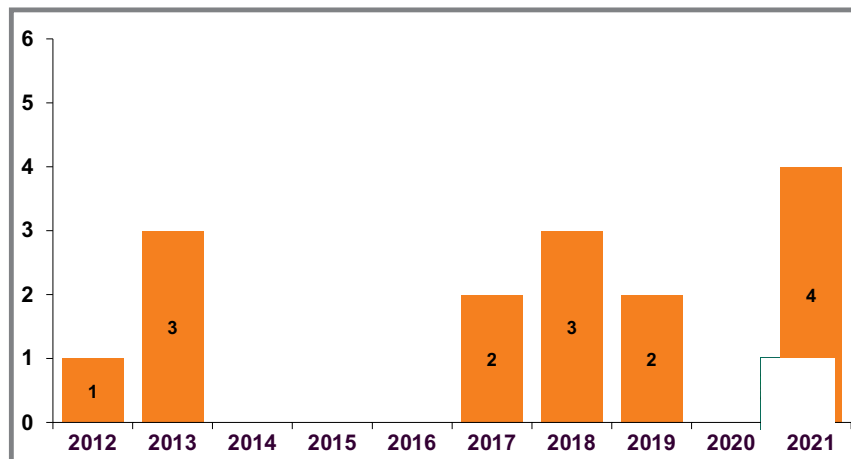
Accidental Suffocation	19	Gunshot Wound	1
Drowning	5	Overdose	1
Fire	4	Prematurity	1
Motor Vehicle Accident	4		

Note: One motor vehicle death was ruled as a homicide and not included.

Number of Drowning Deaths per Year



Number of Fire Deaths by Year



Unintentional Injury Deaths

- 58% of all injury deaths to children were unintentional; the highest percentage in the last 10 years.
- 46% of unintentional deaths were infants.

Drowning

- 6 drowning deaths were the highest in the last 10 years.
- Children ranged from 3 to 17 years. Four were 10 years of age or older.

Fire

- 4 fire deaths were the highest in the last 10 years.
- 3 of the 4 children were in a home without a working smoke detector.

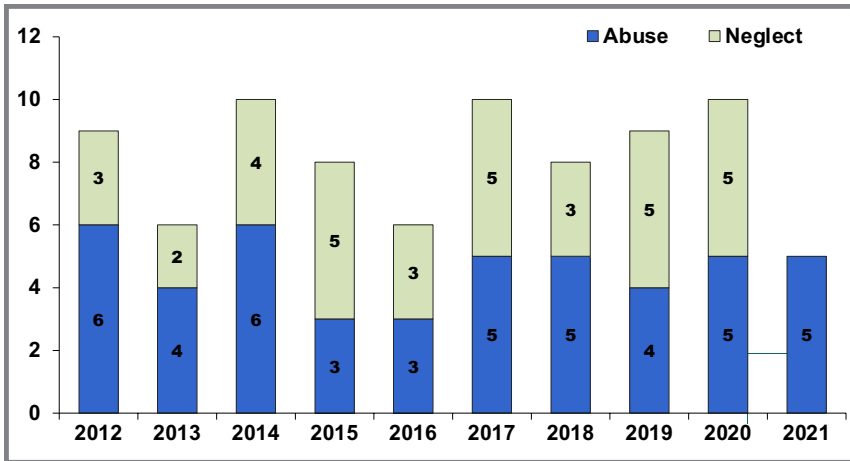
Motor Vehicle Accident

- 5 children died due to motor vehicle accidents.
- The children were between 11 to 17 years of age. All 5 were Black non-Hispanic males and 4 lived in the city of Cleveland.

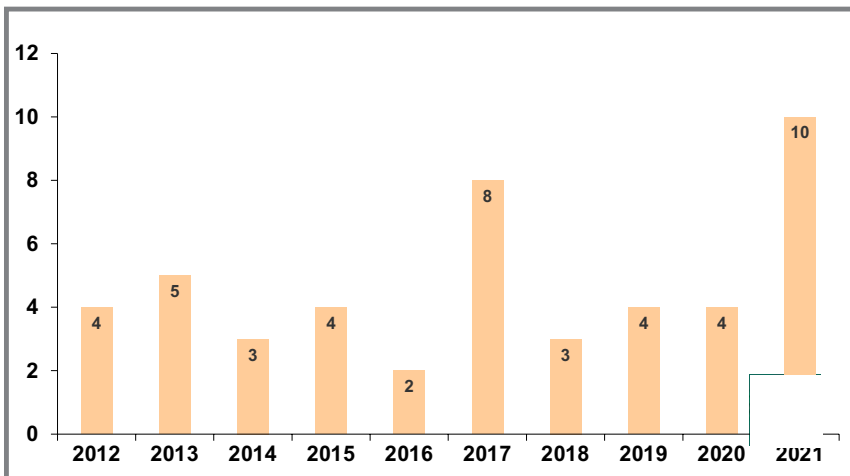
Intentional Injury Related Deaths

Intentional injury related deaths refer to homicides, suicides and deaths due to child abuse or neglect. In 2021, 10 deaths by suicide was the highest number in the last 10 years and tied with 2004 for the highest number in the last 30 years. Deaths due to child abuse and neglect (5) were the lowest in the last 10 years and homicide deaths (12) tied for the second-lowest.

Number of Child Abuse and Neglect Deaths by Year



Number of Deaths by Suicide by Year



Abuse and Neglect

- 5 children died due to abuse or neglect; the lowest in the last 10 years.
- Children ranged from 1 day to 6 years. Three were 4 years of age or younger.

Suicide

- 10 children died by suicide in 2021; the highest number in the last 10 years.
- 5 Black non-Hispanic deaths were the highest in the last 10 years.
- The children were between 12 to 17 years of age. 8 of the 10 children lived in the suburbs.

Homicide

- 12 homicides tied for the second-lowest in the last 10 years.
- 8 of the 12 deaths involved a firearm.

Firearm Deaths

- 14 gun-related deaths were the highest number in the last 10 years.
- 13 of the 14 deaths were ruled a homicide or suicide.

Recommendation

The Cuyahoga County Child Fatality Review Board makes recommendations to protect the health and safety of all children in the community. The recommendations are based on risk factors and circumstances found during the review process.

- Establish a Child Protection Team program for Cuyahoga County that ensures that institutions providing medical care and/or social services have real-time, cross-system collaboration and information sharing at the individual case management level for children who are experiencing, or are at high risk for, child abuse or medical neglect. This need was identified by the Child Fatality Review Board after multiple individual child death case reviews revealed missed intervention opportunities -- due in large part to existing organizational and legal barriers to cross-system collaboration and information sharing.

<https://hhs.cuyahogacounty.us/departments/invest-in-children/child-fatality-review-board>

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