

Child Deaths in Idaho, 2021

Findings from the Idaho Child Fatality Review Team



In 2021, **193** children under the age of 18 died in Idaho. Deaths were selected for further review when meeting one or more of the following criteria:

1. Death was due to an external cause
2. Cause of death was unexplained
3. Death was due to a cause with identified risk factors

	Total	Reviewed by CFR Team
Perinatal Conditions	49	2
Congenital Malformations	22	2
Unintentional Injuries (Accidents)	52	52
<i>Motor Vehicle Accidents</i>	24	24
<i>Sleep Accidents</i>	13	13
<i>Other Accidents</i>	15	15
Suicide	25*	24
Unexplained Infant Death	8	8
<i>SUID</i>	2	2
<i>Ill-defined**</i>	6	6
Assault (Homicide)	2	1***
Malignancies	10	0
Flu/Pneumonia	3	3
COVID-19	0	0
Non-ranking/All Other Causes	22	14
<i>Cardiovascular/Pulmonary</i>	6	6
<i>Undetermined****</i>	3	3
<i>All other causes</i>	13	5
	193	106

*Includes one death where manner was accident but was deemed suicide by CFR Team.

**Includes one death, coded to ICD-10 code Y20.0, that was related to the sleep environment.

***One homicide case was pending in court proceedings, so the review was deferred.

****Undetermined causes of death to those 1-17 years of age.

Unintentional Injuries (Accidents)

There were **52** accident deaths to children. Of these, **24** were motor vehicle accidents. Excess speed, impaired driving, failure to maintain lane, and failure to stop or yield were leading contributing causes. A high percentage of 2021 motor vehicle fatalities occurred on Idaho's rural roads. Exploring engineering solutions to improve the safety of rural roads along with ongoing public reminders of safe driving practices and expanded access to driver's training are recommended. Additionally, lack of proper safety restraint usage (seat belt or safety seat) and inattentive driving continue to be major modifiable risk factors.

Other causes of accident deaths included drowning (**4**), poisonings (**3**), firearms (**2**), avalanche related deaths (**2**), and four other individual causes of death.

Sudden Unexplained Infant Death

Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) is the sudden death of an infant under one year of age, which remains unexplained after a comprehensive investigation. In 2021, the CFR team reviewed **2** SUID cases, **6** undetermined or ill-defined infant deaths, and **13** infant deaths caused by accidents in the sleeping environment.

Unsafe sleep environment (including co-sleeping), caregiver drug and alcohol use, NICU admission at birth, and mother falling asleep while breastfeeding were common risk factors in these infant deaths. Many of the SUID deaths occurred in families with a history of Child Protection Services (CPS) referrals and/or when parents themselves had suffered adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Continued promotion of American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) safe sleep guidelines, abstaining from prenatal drug use and exposure to smoking, and safe breastfeeding practice are recommended. Additional investments in family support services such as home visiting programs, mental health resources, substance abuse resources, and parent and childcare education may also support at risk families and prevent infant deaths.

Intentional Injuries (Suicide and Homicide)

The team reviewed **24** of the **25** youth suicides in Idaho in 2021. **12** suicides were completed via hanging, **11** by firearms, and **1** by self-poisoning. As in past years, prior suicidal ideation, relationship turmoil, ease of access to lethal means, and depression continued to be commonly observed precursors.

The IDHW's Suicide Prevention Program (SPP) provides resources for recognizing the warning signs and supporting those at risk for suicide. They stress that warning signs are almost always present, and conditions are treatable. Proposed approaches to reducing suicide include lethal means reduction education, efforts to increase awareness of the highly lethal nature of hanging and expanded access to mental health treatment along with an anti-stigma campaign designed to normalize the use of mental health services.

In 2021, the CFR team reviewed **1** death due to homicide and **3** undetermined cause deaths to children one year of age and older. Family history with Child Protection Services (CPS), family history of substance abuse, and lack of adequate childcare were risk factors identified by the team. The number of deaths involving family instability suggests a need for greater access to services that support families, and greater follow through on complex CPS cases and home visitation screenings.

Natural Manner Deaths

The CFR Team reviewed **19** natural manner deaths. The natural manner cases selected for additional review included **2** perinatal conditions deaths, **2** congenital malformation deaths, **3** influenza and pneumonia deaths, **6** heart and pulmonary deaths and **8** non-ranking/all other cause deaths.

Of the **106** cases reviewed by the team, there was evidence that at least **2** deaths in 2021 were likely related to families who refused medical care based on religious beliefs. Since Idaho Vital Statistics does not compile the number of deaths to children who are not treated medically because of religious beliefs, it is difficult to estimate the actual number of preventable deaths due to religious objections.

Recommendations for Preventing and Responding to Child Deaths

- Follow infant safe sleep practices
- Follow safe gun handling practices
- Recognize the warning signs of suicide
- Offer CPR courses and First Aid Training in more languages
- Address the dangers posed by rural roads
- Conduct toxicology testing more frequently
- Notify CPS when other children are in the home
- Expand home visiting programs
- Expand access to mental health services
- Recognize the frontline position primary care physicians (PCPs) play in the current adolescent mental health crisis
- Facilitate interagency cooperation
- Use seat belts or age-appropriate safety seats
- Provide service referrals to families and communities touched by a child fatality