

Child & Teen Death

About nine Oklahoma children and youth die every week. Almost fifty (49.0) of every 100,000 Oklahoma children and youth from the ages of 1 through 19, or just under five hundred (461 average) children, die each year.

Just under half (49.0% or 226) of these annual child deaths are children from the ages of 1 through 14; the remainder are teenagers (ages 15 through 19).

The rate of death among Oklahoma children from the ages of 1 through 14 worsened slightly (from 33.2 to 33.5 per 100,000) this past year. The number of Oklahoma counties (38 of 77) in which child death rates stayed the same or improved during the year was just under the number of counties in which child death rates worsened (39 of 77).

A proportionately lower rate (33.5 per 100,000) of children from the ages of 1 through 14 die currently than did in the early 1980s (45.1 per 100,000), with such rates also improving in the large majority (54 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

The rates of death for children from the ages of 1 through 14 in the majority of Oklahoma counties (43 of 77) were better than the average county rate (35.7 per 100,000 children age 1 through 14 in the county). During this most recent period,

the highest and worst rate of child death (85.8 per 100,000 children age 1 through 14 in the county) is found in Tillman County; the lowest and best (0.0 per 100,000) is in three Oklahoma counties (Harmon, Dewey and Greer).

Overall, Oklahoma children and teens are more likely to die of accidents (48.2%) than to die of diseases (31.6%) or violence (20.2%).

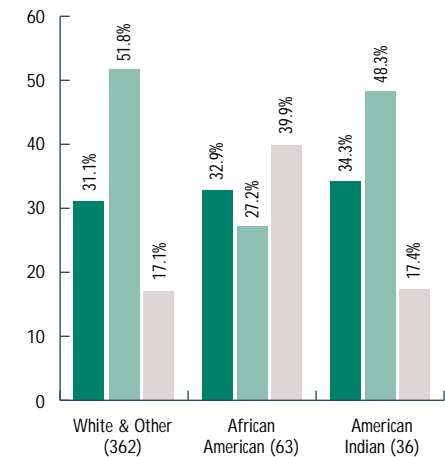
Violence among teens from the ages of 15 through 19 is common with more than one-fourth (27.8%) of all teen deaths resulting from violence. An African American teen is about two and one-half times more likely to die of violence (58.4% of all African American teen deaths) in Oklahoma than his or her White peers (23.4% of all White teen deaths).

Oklahoma's young people kill themselves at a rate almost twice the national average. Thirty-eight Oklahomans under age 20 typically commit suicide each year. While most are older White adolescents, Oklahoma suicides include children under the age of ten.

Even with the improvement in death rates since the 1980s, Oklahoma's ranking relative to other states for the most recent year on record (1995) remains among the worst (45th in child death; 36th in teen death) in the nation.

Impact on Oklahoma

- *Disquieting trends.* Over the last several decades, the leading causes of death for children and teens have changed from natural causes, such as illness and birth defects, to injury and violence. Increases in suicide are much greater among adolescents than among the general population. AIDS is fast becoming a disease of the young. Today, one-half of all new HIV infections in the United States occur in people under the age of twenty-five. Children increasingly imitate violence they observe on television.



Deaths Among Children & Teens
Average Annual Percent, By Cause,
By Race, Oklahoma 1992-1996

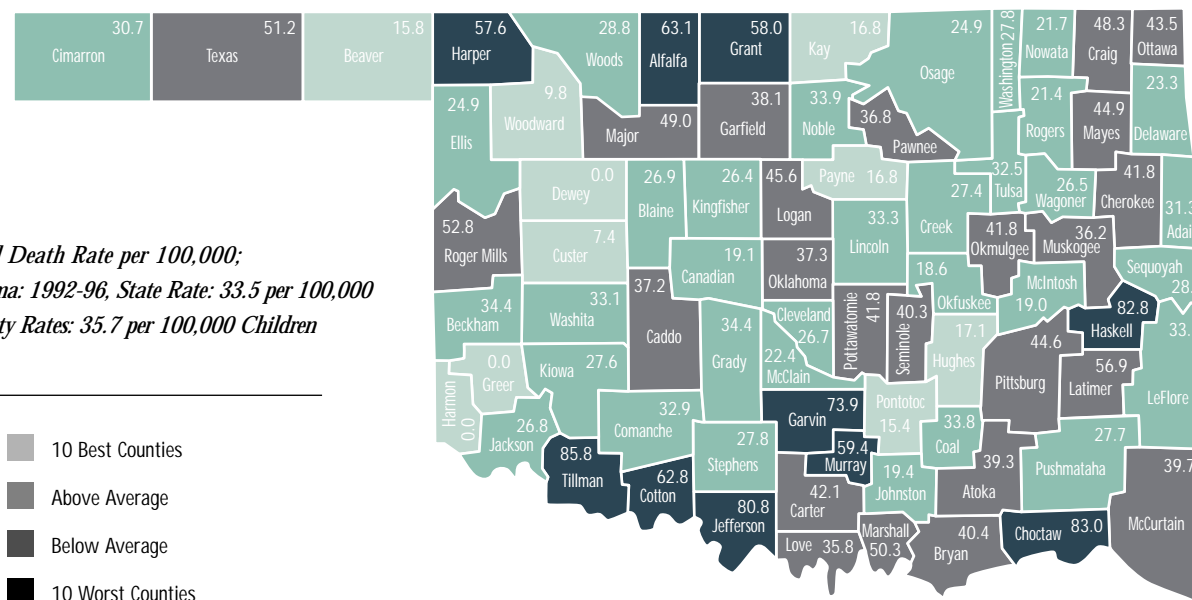
■ Disease
■ Accident
■ Violence

► **Risk factors.** The majority of teen deaths can be attributed to preventable factors, including unhealthy behaviors such as sedentary lifestyle, poor nutritional habits, substance use and abuse, unsafe sexual practices and risky vehicle use. Having a gun at home is associated with increased suicide risk among older adolescents. Poor and minority children are at greater risk of death due to the lack of health insurance and the difficulty obtaining appropriate and necessary medical care. Poor and minority children are less likely to receive lifesaving preventive services. Risk of accidents and the resulting deaths increases for low-income families as they are less likely to use safety devices due to lack of money, lack of transportation to obtain them and/or a lack of control over their housing conditions.

► **Improving the outcomes.** Being connected with community, school and family decreases the risk of violence and death. Reducing poverty, providing effective education, ensuring adequate health care and changing behavior among children and youth to reduce drinking, drug use and other risk-associated behaviors prevent premature death.

Child Deaths
*Five-Year Average Annual Death Rate per 100,000;
 Ages 1 through 14; Oklahoma: 1992-96, State Rate: 33.5 per 100,000
 Children, Average of County Rates: 35.7 per 100,000 Children*

Slightly more than one-third (83 per year or 36.7%) of children ages 1 through 14 who died lived in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together are populated with just over one-third (35.0%) of children ages 1 through 14.



- 10 Best Counties
- Above Average
- Below Average
- 10 Worst Counties