

A community watching over its children

Every year, Lucas County brings together doctors, coroners, caseworkers, and educators to look closely at every child who died — not to assign blame, but to find what could have kept them safe. Here's what the 2025 review found, and what it means for families in our community.



Each dot represents one of the 59 children Lucas County lost in 2025. The gold dots are deaths connected to unsafe sleep — the single most preventable pattern in this report.

59

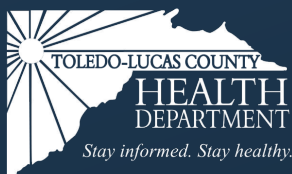
children died in
Lucas County in
2025

50

of those cases
were reviewed by
the board this year

9

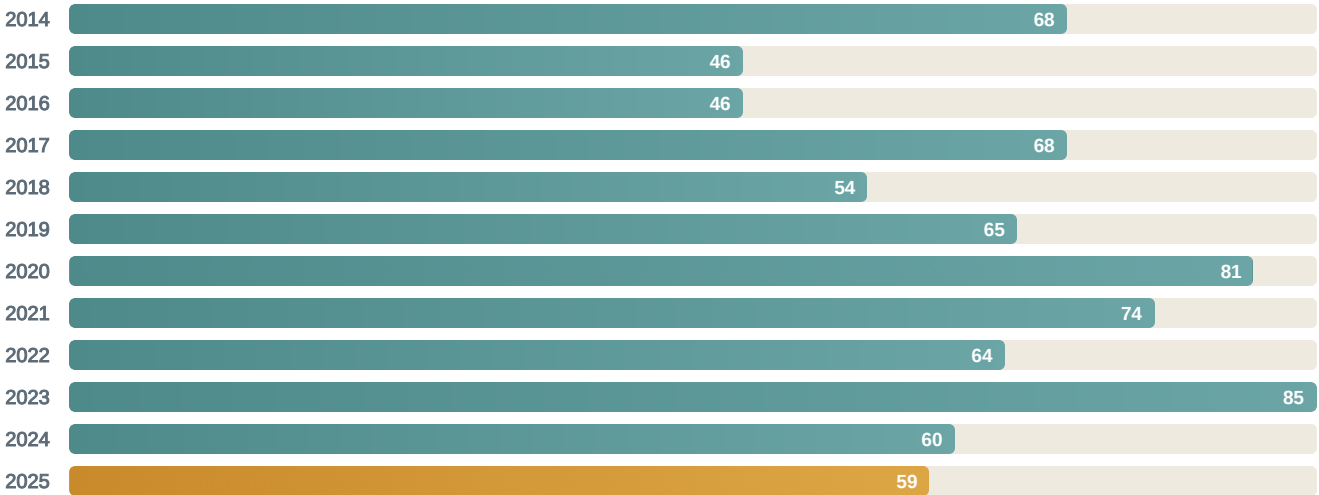
reviews still
pending — 8
homicides, 1
awaiting cause of
death



THE BIG PICTURE

A number that moves, one child at a time

Lucas County has tracked child deaths since 2014. The count moves up and down year to year — but every one of these numbers is a child, a family, and a neighborhood.



59 deaths in 2025 is the second-lowest total in the past decade, continuing a decline from the 2023 high of 85.

THE FIRST YEAR OF LIFE

Where the youngest children are most at risk

Most natural deaths reviewed this year happened in a baby's very first days. Among infants who died before 28 days old, **prematurity was the leading cause** — a reminder of how much prenatal care matters.

Natural deaths, infants under 1 (excluding SIDS)



Natural deaths, children older than 1



SIDS vs. SUID — what's the difference? **SIDS** is the unexplained death of an infant under one, even after a full investigation, autopsy, and scene review. **SUID** is used when investigators can't fully rule out accidental suffocation. Autopsy findings often look similar for both, and a death scene may show risk factors — like a baby sleeping on their stomach or sharing a bed — without clear proof of what caused the death. That overlap is exactly why safe sleep habits matter so much.

Safe sleep: small habits, real protection

In 2025, **9 children** died in an unsafe sleep environment — the single largest preventable category in this report. Most were babies younger than six months.

THE ABCS OF SAFE SLEEP

Alone. On their Back. In a Crib.

A

ALONE — no adults, siblings, pillows, or stuffed animals in the sleep space

B

BACK — always place baby on their back to sleep, every time

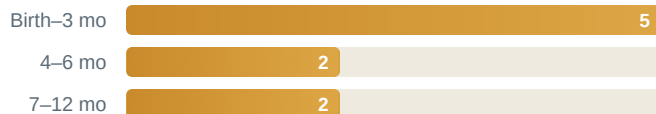
C

CRIB — a crib, bassinet, or pack-and-play with a firm mattress, not a couch or adult bed

65%

of infant deaths investigated by the coroner's office over the past 10 years were related to unsafe sleep practices — and **1 in 3** infant deaths countywide since 2014 have been linked to an unsafe sleep environment.

When it happened (2025, ages of the 9 children)



Elements found in unsafe sleep environments

- Bed-sharing or co-sleeping
- Sleeping on the tummy or side
- Overheating
- Sleeping somewhere other than a crib
- Soft sleeping surfaces
- Loose bedding, pillows, or toys

Free help is available. The Lucas County *Every Baby Sleeps Safe* program gives families a free portable crib after completing a short online safe sleep class — no cost, no judgment. Pacifier use, breastfeeding, and room-sharing (not bed-sharing) can also lower risk. Call **(419) 213-4128** to get connected.

Weapons, homicide, and suicide

This is the hardest part of the report to read, and the hardest for the board to review. Weapons-related deaths — including firearms, hangings, stabbings, and other assaults— were the leading external cause of death in Lucas County in 2025.

Weapons deaths by age



How the 11 weapons deaths happened

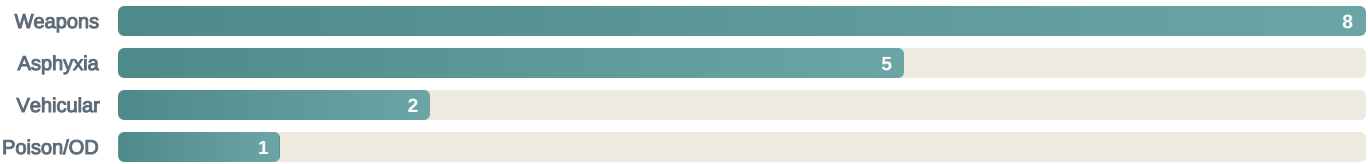
- 7 were classified as homicides, 4 as suicides
- 5 involved a firearm
- 1 was a hanging; 2 involved a vehicle strike
- 2 involved a stabbing or cutting injury

Almost all child weapons deaths were teenagers. 10 of the 11 weapons deaths in 2025 were young people ages 13–17. The board's top recommendations here are practical: talk with your pediatrician about firearms in the home, ask about guns before playdates and sleepovers, and use a lock box. Free gun locks are available through the Health Department.

4 children died by suicide in 2025. The board is calling for expanded school-based suicide prevention and mental health support. If you or a young person you know is struggling, help is available right now by calling or texting 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — free, confidential, and available 24/7.

THE REST OF THE PICTURE

Other causes reviewed in 2025



"Asphyxia" here includes non-sleep-related suffocation (4 of these were unsafe-sleep asphyxia, covered above). 5 additional cases remained undetermined at time of review — 3 White, 5 Black children, most under 6 months old — and 1 death involved poisoning, overdose, or acute intoxication.

WHO WAS AFFECTED

2025 at a glance

BOYS	GIRLS	WHITE	BLACK	TOTAL
30	29	27	32	59

By gender



By race



Black children were disproportionately represented among 2025 fatalities relative to their share of Lucas County's child population — a pattern the board's recommendations on under-served-community access are meant to address.

ALREADY IN MOTION

What Lucas County is doing about it

None of this happens in a vacuum. Here's what local programs delivered in 2025.



Every Baby Sleeps Safe

682 families received a free portable crib and safe sleep education. The program also trains caseworkers, daycare providers, and nurses to teach safe sleep.



Healthy Start / Getting to 1

546 people supported in 2025 — including 219 pregnant women, 90 non-pregnant women, 127 infants, 75 toddlers, and 35 men. Breastfeeding help, smoking cessation, and parenting guidance were a few topics addressed.



WIC Breastfeeding Support

14,742 participants across 8 locations. Lactation consultants and peer helpers logged 8,099 breastfeeding encounters and shipped 11,316 oz of donated milk to the Ohio Mothers' Milk Bank.



Safe Sleep Poster & Press Campaign

Developed with the Coroner's office and area hospitals, now displayed in OB/GYN and pediatric offices countywide, and shared with every family at newborn discharge.

What's Next?

The board's recommendations, grouped by the families they aim to help.



Infant & Sleep Safety

- More referrals to home visiting and Every Baby Sleeps Safe (Cribs 4 Kids) programs
- Teaching parents about infant breathing and airways during prenatal and early pediatric visits
- Continued safe sleep public awareness campaigns and press coverage



Violence & Gun Safety

- Gun safety education for parents during pediatrician visits, plus free gun locks and lock boxes
- Mentoring programs for youth to help prevent gang involvement
- Support programs for younger siblings of youth involved in gang violence



Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

- Expanded school-based suicide prevention programs and mental health awareness
- More social workers in schools
- Broader community access to mental health and substance-use treatment, including for parents and caregivers



Family & Caregiver Support

- Safe, affordable daycare for parents working night and swing shifts
- High school programs for pregnant and parenting teens
- Follow-up support for families with limited health literacy or trouble keeping medical appointments
- More caseworkers for child protective services
- Public awareness campaigns about heatstroke and children left in hot cars

IF YOU NEED HELP TODAY

You don't have to figure this out alone

Safe Sleep & Cribs 4 Kids

(419) 213-4128

Toledo–Lucas County Health Department — free crib program and safe sleep guidance.

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988

Free, confidential support, 24/7 — for you or someone you're worried about.

Gun Locks

Widely Available

Free gun locks and lockboxes are available through local safety programs.