

ALERT: TikTok ‘Benadryl Challenge’ prompts warning from Leavenworth County Attorney’s Office

OFFICE OF LEAVENWORTH COUNTY ATTORNEY
TODD THOMPSON, COUNTY ATTORNEY
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LEAVENWORTH, KAN. --- The Leavenworth County Attorney’s Office has issued a safety alert following the death of a 13-year-old Ohio boy who, according to news reports, died after participating in the dangerous “Benadryl Challenge” trend on TikTok.

According to media reports, Jacob Stevens, of Greenfield, Ohio, died on April 12. Jacob spent nearly a week on a ventilator after attempting the challenge. Stevens’ father, Justin Stevens, told ABC 6 that Jacob was at home with friends when he overdosed, he said Jacob’s friends filmed him attempting the social media challenge when all of a sudden Jacob’s body started seizing. Stevens’s father said, “Keep an eye on what your kids doing with that phone. Talk to them about, you know, the situation, I want everyone to know about my son’s situation.”

Leavenworth County Attorney Todd Thompson said, “All drugs can obviously be dangerous. Combine youth, social media pressure, and drugs and you can have a recipe for disaster.” Thompson added, “Know what is on your child’s phone, you have that right to know. Establish trust and engage in conversation with your child. I’ve said this before and this dad is saying it now, please listen.”

Healthline, a health and wellness website, says the “Benadryl Challenge” encourages TikTok audiences to take high doses of the over-the-counter allergy medication to induce hallucinations.

The Federal Drug Administration issued a warning about the trend in September of 2020:

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is warning that taking higher than recommended doses of the common over-the-counter (OTC) allergy medicine diphenhydramine (Benadryl) can lead to serious heart problems, seizures, coma, or even death. We are aware of news reports of teenagers ending up in emergency rooms or dying after participating in the “Benadryl Challenge” encouraged in videos posted on the social media application TikTok.

We are investigating these reports and conducting a review to determine if additional cases have been reported. We will update the public once we have completed our review or have more information to share. We also contacted TikTok and strongly urged them to remove the videos from their platform and to be vigilant to remove additional videos that may be posted.

“Although we aren’t investigating any active cases involving local youth falling victim to this dangerous trend, we are engaging our community now in an attempt to spread important awareness before we lose a child,” said Thompson.