

Hayden Panettiere Dead at 36: Catholic Roots, Addiction and the Spiritual Battle Behind Her Pain

Actress Hayden Panettiere, who rose to fame in front of America as a child star before becoming known for roles in “Heroes” and “Nashville,” has died at just 36.

Her sudden death brings renewed attention to a life that included extraordinary Hollywood success but also deeply personal struggles with addiction, postpartum depression and the pressures she experienced from entering the entertainment industry at a young age.

Panettiere was found unresponsive Sunday, Aug. 16, at a residence in Greenville, South Carolina, according to People. A friend called 911 around 1:50 p.m., and emergency personnel attempted advanced cardiac life support, including CPR, medications and respiratory assistance. She was pronounced dead at 2:32 p.m.

Dispatch information obtained by People described the emergency as an apparent overdose resulting in cardiac arrest. However, an overdose has not been confirmed as Panettiere’s official cause of death. The Greenville Police Department and Greenville County Coroner’s Office are investigating, and authorities said the preliminary investigation showed no signs of foul play. An autopsy is pending.

Panettiere had previously been remarkably candid about her struggle with substance abuse, including a disturbing experience she said occurred when she was only 15.



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"They were to make me peppy during interviews," Panettiere told *People* in 2022, describing pills she said someone on her team began giving her, as Fox News reported. "I had no idea that this was not an appropriate thing, or what door that would open for me when it came to my addiction."

Years later, those struggles would include opioids and alcohol. Panettiere revealed in her 2026 memoir, "This Is Me: A Reckoning," that her drinking became so severe that a doctor warned she could be dead within five years if she did not stop. *People* reported that she ultimately underwent eight months of treatment in 2020.

Yet another part of Panettiere's story centered on motherhood, religious tradition and her desire to speak openly about healing.

The Christian Post reported in 2015 that Panettiere and then-fiancé Wladimir Klitschko had their daughter, Kaya Evdokia, baptized in Klitschko's native Ukraine. Panettiere, who the outlet reported was raised Catholic, described the baptism as "one of the most incredible parts" of the family's trip. Klitschko was reported to be Eastern Orthodox.

Around the same period, Panettiere was publicly confronting another deeply personal struggle: postpartum depression.

During an appearance on "Live! With Kelly and Michael," Panettiere sought to break misconceptions surrounding the condition and emphasized that women could experience it in different ways.

"Women need to know that they're not alone, and that it does heal," she said, according to The Christian Post.

Those words take on a particularly poignant meaning following her death.

Panettiere spent much of her life in an industry built around appearances, yet increasingly chose to speak publicly about what was happening behind them. Addiction, depression, motherhood, grief and recovery all became parts of a story she was willing to tell.

Fox News Digital reported that Panettiere's representative confirmed her death. She is survived by her 11-year-old daughter, Kaya. Her younger brother, Jansen Panettiere, died in 2023 at 28. During this time, lift up her family and friends in prayer.

Prepared by Charisma Media Staff.