

FIREARM-RELATED INJURY

DESCRIPTION:

Injuries and deaths caused by firearms, including handguns, rifles, and shotguns. These include injuries and deaths caused by another person or self-inflicted. They may be intentionally inflicted or unintended.



Washington State Goal Statement

To decrease deaths and hospitalizations due to firearms

National Healthy People 2020 Objectives

- Reduce firearm-related death rate to 9.2 per 100,000.
- Reduce the nonfatal firearm-related injury rate to 18.6 per 100,000.

Statement of the Problem in Washington State

Firearm injuries in 2011 were the third leading cause of injury death in Washington State. There were a total of 619 firearm deaths in Washington State in 2011. There were 492 firearm-completed suicides. This is about one-half (53 percent) of the suicides in Washington State. There were 92 homicides committed with firearms, or 51 percent of all homicides. Also in 2011, there were nine unintentional firearm deaths.

There were 323 nonfatal hospitalizations in Washington from firearms. The majority (54 percent) were assault related and 30 percent were unintentional. Men accounted for 85 percent of those hospitalizations.

Washington State Data

From 1990 to 1994, firearm death rates held steady at about 12 per 100,000 Washington residents per year. Rates declined from 1994 through 2000 and have held steady at about 9 per 100,000 since then. Washington State rates have historically been slightly lower than the national rate.

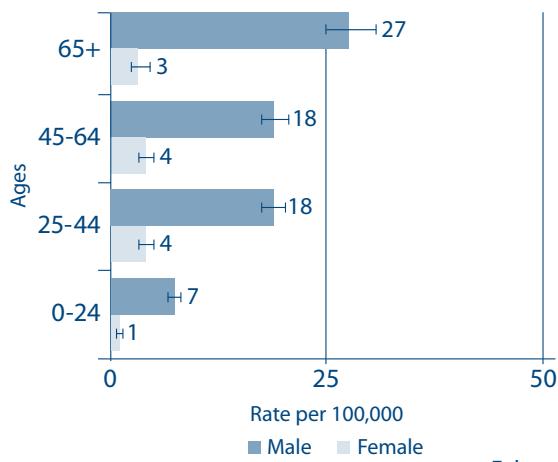
Firearm Deaths
Washington State & United States
Death Certificates, 1990–2011



Age and Gender

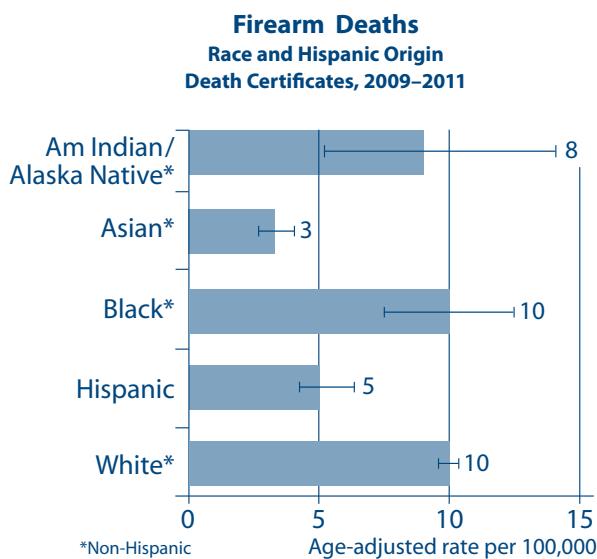
From 2009–2011, the group with the highest risk of firearm death was men over 65. In this group, the vast majority (96 percent) of deaths were suicides. From 2009–2011, males were five times more likely to die from a firearm-related injury than females.

Firearm Deaths
Age and Gender
Death Certificates, 2009–2011



Race and Ethnicity

From 2009–2011 in Washington State, Whites and Blacks had the highest firearm death rates, followed by American Indians and Alaska Natives.



Healthy Youth Survey Data

According to the 2010 Healthy Youth Survey, 10 percent of 8th graders, 11 percent of 10th graders, and 12 percent of 12th graders reported having carried a handgun in their lifetimes. Fourteen percent of 8th graders, 18 percent of 10th graders, and 22 percent of 12th graders reported that a handgun was either "sort of easy" or "very easy" for them to get.

According to the 2008 Healthy Youth Survey, 4 percent of 8th graders, 10th graders and 12th graders carried a firearm at least once during the last 30 days. Of the 10th graders, 7 percent of male respondents and 2 percent of female respondents reported carrying a firearm.

Firearms in Schools

As required by state law, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reports the number of incidents where a weapon is in possession on school premises or school sponsored events. These data come from all 295 public school districts in the state. In the 2011–2012 school year there were 84 firearms incidents. This compares with 103 in 2010–2011, 130 in 2009–2010, 70 in 2008–2009, and 74 in 2007–2008.

OSPI, along with school districts across the state, promotes model policies and practices on harassment and bullying prevention. OSPI and their School Safety Advisory Committee are addressing emergency preparedness and readiness in the event of a school shooter, terrorist activity, or other threat to school safety.

Risk and Protective Factors

Alcohol and drug use

Alcohol and other drug use increases risk of firearm injury. It slows decision making, changes perceptions, inhibits self-control, and encourages high-risk behaviors. Interpersonal interactions and disputes can more easily escalate to violence when alcohol or other drugs are involved.¹

Having a firearm present in the household

About 90 percent of fatal firearm incidents involving children occur in the home. A study of children ages 0–14 showed that 40 percent of firearm incidents happen in the same room where the firearm is stored.² The presence of a household firearm is also linked with an increased risk of adults and adolescents using a firearm to attempt suicide.³ Having a firearm in the house also puts an abused woman at greater risk of being killed.⁴

In one survey, almost one-fourth of the parents with young children kept a firearm at home. In these homes, 70 percent of parents said they had not taken adequate steps to safely store the firearms. Families with children age two to five were more likely to safely store their firearms than families with older children but, overall, few families reported safe firearm storage.⁵

Protective practices include:

- Safe storage.
- Parents asking other parents if they have firearms in their house and how they are stored. Parents can then decide whether to let their children play in that house.
- Physician screening of all youth and families for the presence of and how firearms are stored in the home.
- Physician referral, treatment, and follow-up for those at risk for firearm injury, for example, history of mental illness, depression, or suicide ideation or attempts.⁶

In 2009, according to the Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) about:

- 36 percent of households had at least one firearm.
- 18 percent had an unlocked firearm.
- 9 percent of households had a loaded firearm.
- 6 percent of households had a loaded and unlocked firearm.

In households with children under 18 years old, about:

- 33 percent had at least one firearm
- 15 percent had an unlocked firearm
- 7 percent had a loaded firearm

Relationship with violence

In 2009, nationally, about 67 percent of all murders, 43 percent of all robberies, and 21 percent of all aggravated assaults reported to the police were committed with a firearm.⁷

National data shows that firearm use in intimate partner violence is relatively rare.⁸ However, if a firearm is used in intimate partner homicide, the victim is most likely to be a female. Females are almost four times more likely to be shot by a current or former spouse or boyfriend than by a stranger.⁹

Recommended Strategies

Evidence-Based Strategies

Provide safe storage of firearms

The risk of unintentional injuries and suicides among children and youth decreases significantly when firearms are stored unloaded, locked, and separated from ammunition.³ Firearm owners need correct information on the risks posed by unsecured firearms and how best to secure them.

Securing or removing a firearm from the home reduces the opportunity that youth and adults at risk for suicide will use it to harm themselves. The use of a firearm is the most lethal method of suicide.¹⁰ Parents with teenage children are less likely to store firearms safely than parents with younger children. This is true even though older children are at greater risk for firearm death.¹¹

Public awareness and information campaigns in our state (for example, LOK-IT-UP or ASK) raise awareness and provide education on safely storing firearms. These programs give parents and health care providers accurate information to discuss firearm safety and risk-reducing actions with their children and patients.

Promising or Experimental Strategies

Participate in state and national efforts to improve firearm surveillance

More data on firearm injuries are needed to develop effective interventions to prevent firearm injuries. The data collected should include geographic, socio-demographic, and product-specific information on key causal and contributing factors. These could

include storage practices, alcohol and drug use, perpetrator-victim relationships, and crime involvement.

The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and the State Child Death Review (CDR) databases are two examples of reporting systems that help prevention professionals understand the problem, target the audiences, and develop programs to reduce firearm injury risk.

Establish community coalitions to reduce access to firearms

Communities can begin coalitions with informed representatives from law enforcement, public health, Child Protective Services, parent groups, firearm owners, and others. The coalitions can develop, implement, and monitor local plans to reduce access to firearms and to provide temporary safe storage when short-term removal of a firearm from the home is needed, for example, when a person in the home is depressed or exhibits warning signs of suicide.

Promote the ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign

Many homes with children have firearms that are left unlocked and/or loaded. Children are naturally curious; if a gun is accessible in someone's home there is the risk that a child may find it and play with it. The ASK campaign promotes parents asking other parents if they have firearms in their homes and how they are stored before their child goes to play in that house. If there are doubts about the safety of someone's home, the parents invite the children to play at their house instead.

Strategies used by other states

To prevent unauthorized use of a firearm, some states require firearms to be sold with a safety lock, a lock box, or a personalized lock that meets the current California Attorney General's Office recognized standards (see website in resource list below).

To prevent unintentional discharge, some states require handguns to have loaded-chamber indicators or magazine safety disconnects. Currently, many firearms that are sold through licensed dealers come with a trigger or cable lock. People can purchase trigger and cable locks through retail stores. Law enforcement agencies often have free trigger locks available.

However, since trigger locks may not be as secure as other methods, they are not the preferred method for securing firearms. Many experts recommend using lock boxes, safes, or firearm vaults with a push button, combination, or digital keypad lock.

Twenty-seven states have Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws.¹² CAP laws limit children's access to and use of firearms in the home through requiring firearm owners to store their firearms locked or unloaded or both. When children use a household firearm to threaten or harm themselves or others, CAP laws make the adult responsible for firearm storage liable, often including a criminal penalty—either a gross misdemeanor or Class C felony. Laws with felony penalties are shown to be more effective than those

with misdemeanor penalties. In states that passed CAP laws, unintentional shooting deaths fell by 23 percent among children younger than 15 years of age during the years covered by these laws. Firearm-related homicide and suicide showed modest declines, but were not statistically significant.¹³

Since 1994, licensed firearm dealers have been required to do criminal and mental health background checks on firearm buyers. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Instant Criminal Background System (NICS), from November 30, 1998 through January 31, 2013, the NICS Section has denied a total of 996,558 firearm sales.¹⁴

Conducting criminal background checks of buyers, and limiting the number or types of firearms that can be sold and bought at shows are other ways of preventing firearm injuries. Three states (California, Rhode Island and District of Columbia) require universal background checks, five states (Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, New York, and Oregon) require background checks on all firearms sold at gun shows, and three states (Maryland, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania) require some background checks beyond dealer sales.¹²

Background checks are a tool for preventing firearm injuries and deaths. Consistent policies both at the state and local level are needed to ensure background checks take place.

For More Information

Washington State

LOK-IT-UP: A campaign to promote the Safe Storage of Firearms
www.lokitup.org

National

Center to Prevent Youth Violence; ASK (Asking Saves Kids)
http://www.cpyv.org/?page_id=74

**California Department of Justice, Office of Attorney General,
Roster of Firearm Safety Devices**
<http://safetydevice.doj.ca.gov/dsearch2.asp>

Endnotes

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- ⁶ Duke, N., Resnick, M. D., & Borowsky, W. I. (2005) Adolescent firearm violence: position paper of the Society of Adolescent Medicine. *Journal of Adolescent Medicine*, 37(2), 171-174.
- ⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime in the United States, 2009. (2010). Retrieved on February 6, 2013 from http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2009/offenses/violent_crime/index.html.
- ⁸ Folkes SE, Hilton NZ, Harris GT. (2012). Weapon use increases the severity of domestic violence but neither weapon use nor firearm access increases the risk or severity of recidivism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, epub.
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- ¹¹ Reza, A., et. al. (2003). Source of Firearms Used by Students in School-Associated Violent Deaths - United States, 1992-1999. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 52 (9), 169-172.
- ¹² Public Health – Seattle King County, *Gun Violence in King County*, February 2013. Accessed on February 22, 2013 from www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/data/GunViolence.aspx.
- ¹³ Cummings P., Grossman D.C., Rivara F.P., Koepsell T.D. (1997). State gun safe storage laws and child mortality due to firearms. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278 (13), 1084-1089.
- ¹⁴ U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation *Federal Denials*, National Instant Criminal Background Check System. Accessed on February 6, 2013 from www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/nics/reports/20130205_denials.pdf.

Washington State Department of Health

Injury and Violence Prevention Program

PO Box 47853 , Olympia, WA 98504

360-236-2800

<http://doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention.aspx>

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To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY 711).



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