

Gun Violence

DEFINITION

Gun violence is the number of firearm-related deaths and hospitalizations to Rhode Island children and youth under age 20. The data are reported by place of residence, not place of death, injury, or hospitalization.

SIGNIFICANCE

Children and youth can experience gun violence as victims of firearm assaults, self-inflicted injuries, or accidental shootings. Gun violence can also be experienced when gunshots are heard or a shooting is witnessed.¹ Gun violence also can impact children and youth when someone they know is the victim or perpetrator of a shooting. Exposure to violence at home, in schools, and in the community can lead to lasting psychological and emotional damage, including post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use, behavioral problems, depression, anxiety, cognitive and attention difficulties, delinquent acts like assault and property destruction, and adult criminal behavior.^{2,3}

In the U.S., firearms are now the leading cause of death among children and youth ages one to 19, surpassing motor vehicle deaths. American children and youth are 21 to 23 times more likely to be killed by a gun than their peers in other high-income countries.^{4,5} Of the firearm child and youth deaths in 2022,

66% were classified as homicide, 27% were suicide and 5% were accidental.⁶ In the U.S., there was a 49% increase in gun-related deaths from 2019 to 2021 for children under age 17.⁷

During 2021, 4,752 U.S. children and youth under age 20 were killed by firearms. Of these children and youth killed, 83% (3,927) were older teens ages 15 to 19.⁸ Nationally in 2021, males ages 15 to 19 were seven times more likely to die from a firearm than females of the same age.⁹

Gun violence impacts American children and teens disproportionately. Black youth are 17 times more likely and Hispanic youth are 2.7 times more likely to die by gun homicide than their white peers. There are similar disproportionate concentrations of gun violence within cities where neighborhoods that have experienced historic disinvestment experience higher concentrations of violence compared to other neighborhoods within the same city.¹⁰

Preventing access to guns is an important measure in preventing firearm-related injuries and death in children and youth. The presence and availability of a gun is strongly associated with adolescent suicide risk. Keeping guns unloaded and locked, as well as storing and locking ammunition separately, reduces the risk of gun-related injury and death by suicide or homicide.^{11,12}

Gun-Related Emergency Department (ED) Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Among Children and Youth, Rhode Island, 2018-2022

AGE	# OF ED VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS
1 to 14	34	<5	0
15 to 17	50	<5	<5
18 to 19	63	10	7
TOTAL	147	17	11

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2018-2022.

★ **Between 2018 and 2022 in Rhode Island, 11% (11) of the 96 injury deaths of children and youth under age 20 were the result of firearms. All of the child deaths due to firearms were among youth over the age of 14.¹³ Between 2018 and 2022 in Rhode Island, there were fewer than five youth between the ages of 15 to 19 who committed suicide using a firearm.¹⁴**

★ **In Rhode Island between 2018 and 2022, there were 147 emergency department visits and 17 hospitalizations of children and youth for gun-related injuries, a decrease from between 2017 and 2021 (184 emergency department visits, and 22 hospitalizations).^{15,16}**

Gun Safety Legislation

★ **During 2022, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed three significant bills aimed at preventing further firearm-related injuries and violence in our communities. These bills increased the age for purchasing firearms and ammunition from age 18 to 21, created a ban on loaded rifles in public, and limited magazine capacity to 10 rounds of ammunition.¹⁷**

★ **The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends public policies to protect children from gun injuries and violence. Among these recommended policies are bans on assault weapons and safe firearm storage. Rhode Island does not currently have a ban on assault weapons.¹⁸**

References

^{1,5,10} Everytown Research & Policy. (2023). *The impact of gun violence on children and teens*. Retrieved from everytownresearch.org

² The American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021). *Childhood exposure to violence*. Retrieved from healthychildren.org

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