

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 misuse and abuse, 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 homicide, 27% were suicide and 5% were accidental.⁶ In the U.S., there was a 49% increase in gun-related deaths among children under age 18 from 2019 to 2021.⁷

During 2022, 4,619 U.S. children and youth under age 20 were killed by firearms. Of these children and youth killed, 83% (3,835) were older teens ages 15 to 19.⁸ Nationally in 2022, 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, with neighborhoods that have experienced historic disinvestment experiencing higher concentrations of violence compared to other neighborhoods in the same city.¹⁰

Preventing access to guns is key to 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, 2019-2023

AGE	# OF ED VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS
1 to 14	33	<5	0
15 to 17	41	<5	5
18 to 19	57	16	6
TOTAL	131	23	11

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2019-2023.

◆ Between 2019 and 2023 in Rhode Island, 16% (11) of the 69 injury deaths of children and youth under age 20 were the result of firearms. All the child deaths due to firearms were among youth over the age of 14.¹³ Between 2019 and 2023 in Rhode Island, fewer than five youth ages 15 to 19 committed suicide using a firearm.¹⁴

◆ In Rhode Island between 2019 and 2023, there were 131 emergency department visits and 23 hospitalizations of children and youth for gun-related injuries, a decrease from 2014 to 2018 when there were 153 emergency department visits and 36 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.^{18,19} During 2024, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that requires the safe storage of firearms.²⁰

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(continued on page 183)

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(continued from page 89)

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(continued from page 90)

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(continued from page 91)

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(continued from page 93)

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