

# Gun Violence

## DEFINITION

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

## SIGNIFICANCE

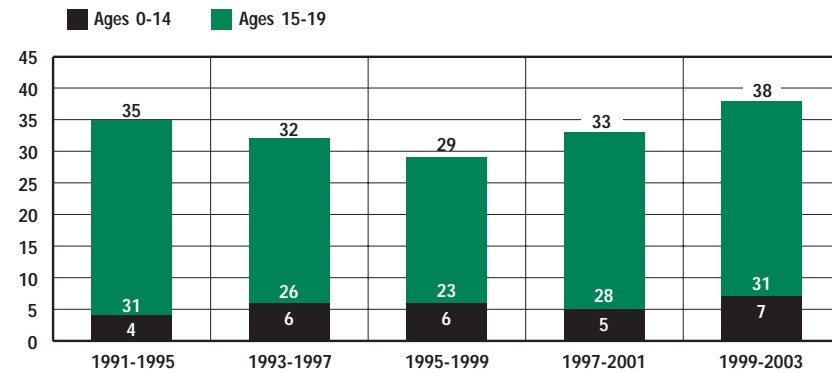
Gun violence affects all children and youth, not only those who are victims and perpetrators. Gun violence threatens the psychological, emotional, and social well-being of individuals and communities.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the accessibility of handguns became a major safety concern for children and youth in the United States. The youth gun violence epidemic peaked in 1994, when 5,833 young people under age 20 died from firearm injuries.<sup>2</sup> Between 1993 and 2001 in the U.S., the number of firearm-related crimes decreased by 63%, while the number of firearm-related murders dropped by 41%.<sup>3</sup> The gun death rate is still a cause for concern for children. The percentage of homicides victims killed with a gun increases up to age 17 and then declines.<sup>4</sup>

Nationally, in 2002, youth ages 15 to 24 were at highest risk for death by firearms with a death rate of 16.7 per 100,000 residents.<sup>5</sup> The likelihood of being a victim of gun violence is linked to gender and race. In the U.S., males 15 to 24-years-old are more than 8 times as likely as females 15 to 24-years-old to die as a result of a firearm.<sup>6</sup> Black (87.1), Hispanic (32.1) and Native American (30.0) males ages 15 to 24 had a disproportionately higher firearm-related death rate per 100,000, than their White (15.6) or Asian (11.7) male counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

Between 1995 and 1999 in the U.S., nearly one third (32%) of child handgun homicide victims were murdered by another child.<sup>8</sup> Factors that place young people at risk for violent perpetration include a history of early aggression, neighborhood violence, poor supervision, exposure to violence in the home, parental drug/alcohol abuse, association with peers engaged in high-risk behavior, low commitment to school, poverty diminished economic opportunity, high levels of transience and family disruption.<sup>9</sup>

## Gun Deaths, Children Ages 0-14 and 15-19, Rhode Island, 1991-2003



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rhode Island Injury Mortality Statistics 1990-1996. Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Health Statistics, 1995-2003.

◆ Rhode Island's trend in gun deaths among youth is disproportionately driven by gun death rates among teens ages 15 to 19. Between 1999 and 2003 in Rhode Island, 82% of youth gun deaths were to teens ages 15 to 19, and 18% were to children under the age of 15.<sup>10</sup>

## Gun Hospitalizations

◆ There were 64 gun-related hospitalizations between 1999 and 2003 for children under age 20.<sup>11</sup> Of the 64 hospitalizations, five victims were younger than age 15 and 59 were between the ages of 15 to 19. Eighty percent (51) of the 64 hospitalized youths were victims of assault, 17% (11) were victims of unintentional injuries, 2% (1) were hospitalized for a self-inflicted firearm injury, and 2% (1) were undetermined.<sup>12</sup>

◆ Of the youth in Rhode Island hospitalized for gun-related injuries between 1999 and 2003, 80% were residents of the core cities (70% from Providence, 6% from Central Falls and 3% from Pawtucket).<sup>13</sup>



## Preventing Youth Gun Violence

*No single policy or effort will end youth gun violence. However, several strategies implemented simultaneously can mitigate the number of instances and the lethality of gun violence among children and youth:*

- ◆ Reduce the exposure of children to guns in the home by educating parents to the risks that guns pose to their children and increasing awareness of safety measures. The best way to prevent firearm injuries among children is to remove guns from the home or store guns properly and separate from their ammunition.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Reduce children's exposure to guns in the media by increasing parental monitoring of programming and limiting the time children spend watching television, playing video games and accessing the computer.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ Engage communities in antiviolence initiatives, community revitalization and public awareness campaigns to change youth attitudes towards guns. Important in the community approach is a partnership with law enforcement to communicate social norms against youth gun carrying and gun violence.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ Some injury prevention experts believe that changing the design of guns and requiring product safety features could reduce unintentional injuries among children and youth.<sup>17</sup> A recent study found that incorporating three key safety devices on firearms (personalized devices, loaded changer indicator and magazine safeties) could have prevented 44% of deaths.<sup>18</sup>

### References

<sup>1,2,24</sup> Fingerhut, L.A. & Kaufer Christoffel, K. (2002). Firearm-related death and injury among children and adolescents. *The Future of Children*, 12(2), 25-37.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, C. (2003). *National crime victimization survey, 1993-2001: Weapon use and violent crime* (Special Report). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.


<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics *homicide trends in the U.S.: Weapons used*. (n.d.) Retrieved February 11, 2005 from www.ojp.gov.

<sup>5,6,7</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. (2004) *Health, United States, 2004. With chartbook on trends in the health of Americans*. Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>8</sup> *Kids in the line of fire: Children, handguns, and homicide*. (2001). New York, NY: Violence Policy Center.

<sup>9</sup> *Youth violence in the United States fact sheet*. (2003). Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

<sup>10,11,12,13</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Health Statistics, 1999-2003.



◆ Research shows a strong correlation between firearm availability and firearm-related deaths and injuries among children and teens.<sup>19</sup> The availability of guns in the home significantly increases the risk of suicide and unintentional injury for children under 20 years of age. More than 75% of the guns used in youth suicide attempts and unintentional injuries are stored in the residence of the victim, a relative, or a friend.<sup>20</sup>

◆ Research finds that in homes with guns keeping a gun locked and unloaded and storing ammunition locked and in a separate location reduces gun injuries to children and teenagers.<sup>21</sup>

◆ It was estimated that 35% of American households with children under 18 years old have at least one firearm and that 43% of those homes had at least one unlocked firearm.<sup>22</sup> A reported 1.4 million homes with 2.6 million children have firearms that are stored unlocked and loaded or unlocked and unloaded but stored with ammunition.<sup>23</sup>

◆ Rhode Island is one of five states with the lowest levels of gun ownership. Children living in states with the highest levels of gun ownership are 16 times more likely to die from unintentional firearm injury, 7 times more likely to die from firearm suicide, and 3 times more likely to die from homicide than children living in the states with the lowest levels of gun ownership.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>14,15,16,17</sup> Reich, K., Culross, P. & Behrman, R. (2002). Children, youth and gun violence: Analysis and recommendations. *The Future of Children*, 12(2), 5-23.

<sup>18</sup> Vernick, J. S., O'Brien, M., Hepburn, L. M., Johnson, S. B., Webster, D. W. & Hargarten, S. W. (2003). Unintentional and undetermined firearm related deaths: A preventable death analysis for three safety devices. *Injury Prevention*, 9, 307-311.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, M., Azrael, D. & Hemenway, D. (2002). Firearm availability and unintentional firearm deaths, suicide, and homicide among 5-14 year olds. *Journal of Trauma*, 52(2), 267-275.

<sup>20,23</sup> *Protect children instead of guns*. (2004). Washington, DC: The Children's Defense Fund.

<sup>21,22</sup> Grossman, D., Mueller, B., Riedy, C., Dowd, M., Villaveces, A., Prodzinski, J., Nakagawara, J., Howard, J., Thiersch, N. & Harruff, R. (2005). Gun storage practices and risk of youth suicide and unintentional firearm injuries. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 293(6), 707-714.