

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.¹ 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.² Between 1994 and 2000 in the U.S., the number of firearm-related deaths per year decreased by 48% to 3,012.³ The gun death rate is still cause for concern. In the U.S., 8 children and teens are killed by gunfire every day, and nearly 90,000 children and teens have died from gunshot wounds since 1979.⁴

Research shows a strong correlation between firearm availability and firearm-related deaths and injuries among children and teens. Between

1988 and 1997, a disproportionately high number of 5-14 year olds died by gunfire in states and regions with the highest levels of gun ownership.⁵ 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.⁶ In the late 1990s, it was estimated that 35% to 40% of American households had guns, and as many as 25% had handguns.⁷ 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.⁸

Between 1995 and 1999 in the U.S., nearly one third (32%) of child handgun homicide victims were murdered by another child.⁹ 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.¹⁰

Gun Deaths, Children Ages 0-19, Rhode Island, 1993-2002

Year	Number of Deaths	Year	Number of Deaths
1993	10	1998	5
1994	6	1999	8
1995	6	2000	10
1996	6	2001	6
1997	4	2002	7
<i>Total</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>36</i>

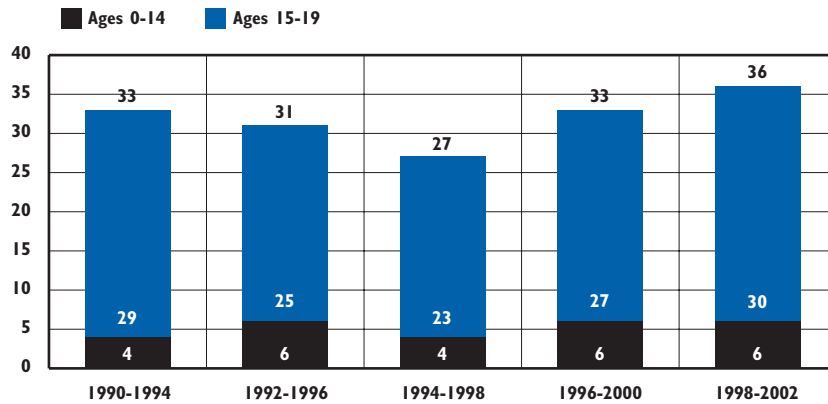
Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Rhode Island Injury Mortality Statistics 1990-1996. Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Health Statistics, 1995-2002.

◆ Compared to the steady annual decline in the national number of youth firearm deaths per year since 1994, the number of firearm deaths to children under age 20 in Rhode Island declined from 10 in 1993 to 4 in 1997, but increased again in 2000 to 10 deaths.¹¹ In 2002, 7 Rhode Island children under 20 years of age died by gunfire.¹²

Risk Factors for Gun Violence

- ◆ Nationally, in 2000, youth ages 17 to 19 were at highest risk for death by firearms in the U.S., with males having a firearm death rate 8 times higher than females.¹³
- ◆ Nationally, the firearm death rate for Black males between ages 15 and 19 is four times that of White males in the same age group.¹⁴ In 2000, the most common cause of death for all adolescents in the U.S. was motor vehicle traffic injury, except for Black males, who were twice as likely to die from a firearm injury as from a motor vehicle traffic injury.¹⁵
- ◆ In the U.S. Black children and youth are more likely than their White counterparts to be victims of firearm homicide. White children and youth are at higher risk for firearm suicide than their Black counterparts.¹⁶

Gun Deaths, Children Ages 0-14 and 15-19, Rhode Island, 1990-2002



Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Rhode Island Injury Mortality Statistics 1990-1996. Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Health Statistics, 1995-2002.

◆ Between 1998 and 2002 in Rhode Island, 83% of youth gun deaths were to teens ages 15 to 19, and 17% were to children under the age of 15.^{17,18}

◆ Of the six New England states, Rhode Island has the 2nd highest rate of handgun homicide of victims under 18 years of age.¹⁹

◆ Children and youth residing in New England are at a lower risk for firearm homicide, suicide and unintentional firearm death than children and youth residing in other regions in the U.S.²⁰ Compared to other regions in the U.S., New England has the second lowest level of handgun ownership (17% of residents).²¹

Gun Hospitalizations

◆ Between 1992 and 1996 in Rhode Island there were 121 hospitalizations of children under age 20 for firearm-related injuries. This number declined to 63 hospitalizations between 1998 and 2002. Of these, 8 victims were younger than age fifteen and 55 were teens ages 15 to 19. Forty-five of the 63 hospitalized youths were victims of assault, 13 were victims of unintentional injuries, and 4 were hospitalized for self-inflicted firearm injuries.²²

◆ Gun violence disproportionately affects low-income people and imposes significant medical, law enforcement, and other costs on society as a whole.²³ Of the youth hospitalized for gun-related injuries between 1998 and 2002, 73% were residents of the core cities with 62% from Providence, 5% from Central Falls, 5% from Pawtucket, and almost 2% from Woonsocket.²⁴

References

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