

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 firearm injuries, or accidental shootings.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 abuse, behavioral problems, depression, anxiety, cognitive and attention difficulties, delinquent acts like assault and property destruction, and adult criminal behavior.^{2,3}

2021 was the deadliest year for gun violence in U.S. history, and firearm-related injuries remain the leading cause of death in the U.S. among children and youth ages one to 19, surpassing motor vehicle deaths.^{4,5} While overall deaths due to firearms increased by 8% from 2020 to 2021, deaths due to firearms among children under age 18 increased by 12.7%.⁶ In the U.S., there was a 29% increase in gun-related deaths from 2019 (3,390) to 2020 (4,368).⁷ In the U.S.

during 2020, 64% (2,811) of the 4,368 firearm deaths of children and youth under age 20 were the result of homicide, 30% (1,293) were the result of suicide, 3% (149) were the result of unintentional injuries, 2% (90) were the result of shootings with an undetermined intent, and less than 1% (25) were the result of a “legal intervention” (e.g., law enforcement shooting).⁸

Of the 4,368 U.S. children and youth under age 20 killed by firearms during 2020, 83% (3,617) were ages 15 to 19.⁹ Nationally in 2020, males ages 15 to 19 were more than seven times more likely to die from a firearm-related incident than females of the same age. Black and Native American children and teens are disproportionately more likely to be hurt or killed by gun violence. Among teens ages 15 to 19 in the U.S., the rate of firearm deaths for non-Hispanic Black males (101.1 per 100,000) was over six times the rate of non-Hispanic white males (15.8 per 100,000) in 2020.¹⁰

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, 2017-2021

AGE	# OF ED VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS
1 to 14	50	<5	0
15 to 17	62	<5	<5
18 to 19	72	13	7
TOTAL	184	20	11

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2017-2021.

Note: Effective October 1, 2015, the International Classification of Disease (ICD) codes changed from the 9th classification to the 10th classification, which may impact comparability across the years.

◆ **Between 2017 and 2021 in Rhode Island, 11 (13%) of the 87 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 2017 and 2021 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 2017 and 2021, there were 184 emergency department visits and 20 hospitalizations of children and youth for gun-related injuries, a slight decrease from between 2016 and 2020 (189 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 Rhode Island. 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 high-capacity magazines. Rhode Island does not currently have a ban on assault weapons.¹⁸**

(References are on page 184)