

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}

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 1% (25) were the result of a "legal intervention" (e.g., law enforcement shooting).⁴

In 2018, gun violence was the leading cause of death in the U.S.

overall among children and teens.⁵ In the U.S., there was a 29% increase in gun-related deaths from 2019 (3,390) to 2020 (4,368).⁶ Of the 4,368 U.S. children and youth under age 20 killed by firearms during 2020, 83% (3,617) were ages 15 to 19.⁷ 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 approximately six times the rate of non-Hispanic white males (15.8 per 100,000) in 2020.⁸

Preventing access to guns is an important measure in preventing firearm-related injuries and death in children and youth. During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, while more children were at home due to school closures, accidental gun deaths among children increased by 30% compared to previous years.⁹ The presence and availability of a gun is also 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.^{10,11}

Gun-Related Emergency Department (ED) Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Among Children and Youth, Rhode Island, 2016-2020

AGE	# OF ED VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS
1 to 14	58	<5	0
15 to 17	71	7	<5
18 to 19	60	12	<5
TOTAL	189	22	5

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2016-2020.

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 2016 and 2020 in Rhode Island, five (6%) of the 80 injury deaths of children and youth under age 20 were the result of firearms.¹² Of these, the majority of child deaths due to firearms were among youth over the age of 15.¹³ Between 2016 and 2020 in Rhode Island, there were fewer than five youth under age 20 who committed suicide using a firearm.¹⁴

◆ In Rhode Island between 2016 and 2020, there were 189 emergency department visits, up from 145 between 2015 and 2019 while hospitalizations of children and youth for gun-related injuries decreased from 31 to 22.^{15,16}

Weapon Carrying Among Rhode Island Public Middle and High School Students, 2019

	FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
High School students who carried a weapon on school property at least once in the past 30 days	3%	4%	4%
Middle School students who ever carried a weapon	11%	26%	19%

Source: 2019 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis.

◆ Nationally and in Rhode Island, male students report higher rates of weapon carrying on school property and gun carrying than females.^{17,18}

References

¹ Xu, J., Murphy, S. L., Kochanek, K. D., & Arias, E. (2021). Deaths: Final data for 2019. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 70(8).

(continued on page 185)