

FIREARM-RELATED INJURY

DESCRIPTION:

Injuries and deaths caused by a firearm, including handguns, rifles and shotguns. These include injuries and deaths caused by another person or self-inflicted. They may be intentionally inflicted or unintended.



Washington State Goal Statement

To decrease deaths and hospitalizations due to firearms

National Healthy People 2010 Objectives

- Reduce firearm-related death rate from 11.3 per 100,000 in 1998 to no more than 4.1 per 100,000
- Reduce the proportion of persons living in homes with firearms that are loaded and unlocked from 19% in 1998 to 16%
- Reduce the nonfatal firearm-related injury rate from 24.0 per 100,000 in 1997 to 8.6 per 100,000

Statement of the Problem in Washington State

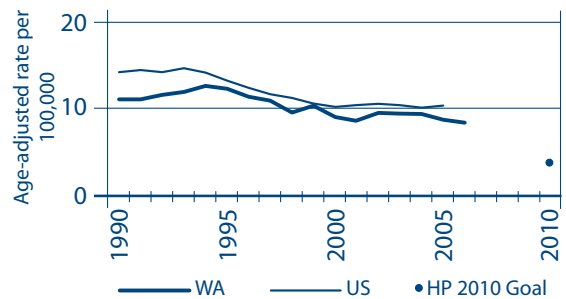
Firearm injuries in 2006 were the fourth leading cause of injury death in Washington State. There were 392 firearm-completed suicides. This is about one-half (49%) of the suicides in Washington State. There were 121 homicides committed with firearms, or 55% of all homicides. Also in 2006, there were nine unintentional firearm deaths:

- Three among 10- to 19-year olds.
- Three among 20- to 34-year olds.
- One among 45- to 54-year olds.
- Two among those 75 years old and older.

Washington State Data

Washington State's firearm death rate declined from 11 per 100,000 in 1990 to 8 per 100,000 in 2006. It has historically been slightly lower than the national rate. Washington State's firearm death rate is about double the national Healthy People 2010 goal of 4.1 per 100,000.

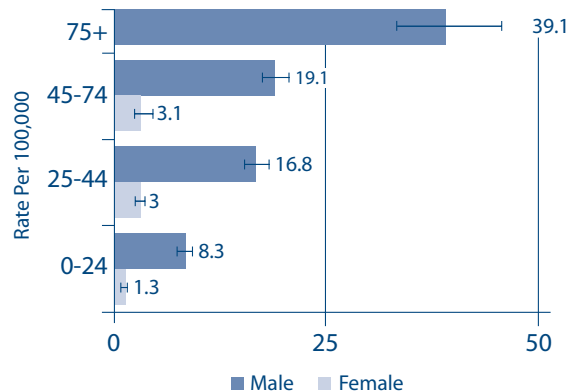
Firearm-related Deaths
Washington State & United States Death Certificates, 1990-2006



Age and Gender

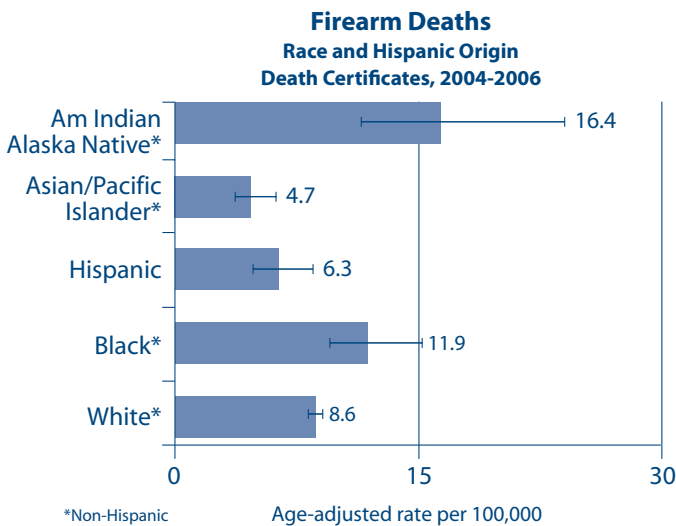
From 2004-2006, the group with the highest risk of firearm-related death was men over 75 years. In this group, the vast majority (98%) of deaths were suicides. From 2004-2006, males were six times more likely to die from a firearm-related injury than females. Females 75 years and older had fewer than 20 deaths. The chart does not include them.

Firearm-related Deaths
Age and Gender
Death Certificates, 2004-2006



Race and Ethnicity

From 2004-2006 in Washington State, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Blacks had the highest firearm-related death rates. Whites had higher firearm-related death rates than Hispanics and Asian and Pacific Islanders.



Healthy Youth Survey Data

According to the 2004 Healthy Youth Survey, 3% of 8th graders, 10th graders and 12th graders carried a firearm at least once during the last 30 days. This means more than 8,200 students in these three grades had a firearm in their possession. Of the 10th graders, 5% of male respondents (about 2,400 students) reported carrying a firearm. About 1% of females (some 450 students) reported carrying a firearm.

Firearms in Schools

As required by state law, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reports the number of incidents where a weapon is in possession on school premises or school sponsored events. This data comes from all 296 public school districts in the state. In the 2005-2006 school year, there were 78 firearms incidents. This compares to 64 in 2004-2005, 57 in 2003-2004, and 116 in 2002-2003. While the number varies by year, there is an increasing trend in overall possession of knives and other weapons on school grounds and at school events.

OSPI, along with school districts across the state, promotes model policies and practices on harassment and bullying. OSPI and their School Safety Advisory Committee are addressing emergency preparedness and readiness in the event of a school shooter, terrorist activity, or other threat to school safety.

Risk and Protective Factors

Alcohol and drug use

Alcohol and other drug use increases risk of firearm injury. It slows decision making, changes perceptions, inhibits self-control, and encourages high-risk behaviors. Interpersonal interactions and disputes can more easily escalate to violence when alcohol or other drugs are involved.¹

Having a firearm present in the household

About 90% of fatal firearm incidents involving children occur in the home. A study of children ages 0-14 showed that 40% of firearm incidents happen in the same room where the firearm is stored.²

The presence of a household firearm is also linked with an increased risk of adults and adolescents using a firearm to attempt suicide.³ Having a firearm in the house also puts an abused woman at greater risk of being killed.⁴

In one survey, almost one-fourth of the parents with young children keep a firearm at home. The survey of 3,754 parents at 96 pediatric practices covered 45 states, Puerto Rico, and Canada, yet in 70% of homes with guns, parents said they had not taken adequate steps to safely store it.

Families with children age two to five were more likely to safely store their firearms than families with older children, but overall few families reported safe firearm storage. The practice of safe storage, defined as unloaded firearms, locked in a cabinet or with a gun lock, with ammunition stored separately, is not widespread.⁵

Protective practices include:

- Safe storage.
- Parents asking other parents if they have firearms in their house and how they are stored - parents can then decide whether to let their children play in the house.
- Physician screening of all youth and families for presence of and how firearms are stored in the home.
- Physician referral, treatment, and follow-up for those at risk for firearm injury, for example, history of mental illness, depression, or suicide ideation or attempts.⁶

In 2004, according to the Behavioral Risk Factor Survey System (BRFSS) about:

- 34% of Washington State households had at least one firearm.⁷
- 7% of households had a loaded firearm.
- 4% had a loaded and unlocked firearm.

In households with children under 18 years old, about:

- 32% had at least one firearm (590,000 children).
- 6% had a loaded firearm (105,000 children).
- 2% had a loaded and unlocked firearm (39,000 children).

Recommended Strategies

Evidence-Based Strategies

Provide safe storage of firearms

The risk of unintentional injuries and suicides among children and youth decreases significantly when firearms are stored unloaded, locked, and separated from ammunition.³ Firearm owners need correct information on the risks posed by unsecured firearms and how best to secure them.

Securing or removing a firearm from the home reduces the opportunity that youth and adults at risk for suicide will use it to harm themselves. The use of a firearm is the most lethal method of suicide.⁹ Even when they are aware of a firearm in the home, parents with teenaged children are less likely to store firearms safely than parents with younger children. This is true even though older children are at greater risk for firearm death.¹⁰

Public awareness and information campaigns in our state (for example, LOK-IT-UP or ASK) raise awareness and provide education on safely storing firearms. These programs give parents and health care providers accurate information to discuss firearm safety and risk-reducing actions with their children and patients.

Promising or Experimental Strategies

Participate in state and national efforts to improve firearm surveillance

More data on firearm injuries is needed to develop effective interventions to prevent firearm injuries. The data collected should include geographic, socio-demographic, and product-specific information on

Relationship with violence

In 2005, nationally, about 68% of all murders, 42% of all robberies, and 21% of all aggravated assaults reported to the police were committed with a firearm.⁷

National data shows that if a firearm is used in intimate partner homicide, the victim is most likely a female. Females are almost four times more likely than men to be shot by a current or former spouse or boyfriend than by a stranger.⁸

key causal and contributing factors. These include, for example storage practices, alcohol and drug use, perpetrator-victim relationships, and crime involvement.

The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and the State Child Death Review (CDR) databases are two examples of reporting systems. They help prevention professionals understand the problem, target the audiences, and develop programs to reduce firearm injury risk.

Establish community coalitions to reduce access to firearms

Communities can begin coalitions with informed representatives from law enforcement, public health, Child Protective Services, parent groups, firearm owners, and others. The coalitions can develop, implement, and monitor local plans to reduce access to firearms and to provide temporary safe storage when short-term removal of a firearm from the home is needed -- for example, when a person in the home is depressed or exhibits warning signs of suicide.

Promote the ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign

Children are naturally curious; if a gun is accessible in someone's home there is the risk that a child may find it and play with it. The ASK campaign promotes parents asking other parents if they have firearms in their homes and how they are stored before their child goes to play in that house. If there are doubts about the safety of someone's home, the parents invite the children to play at their house instead.

Strategies Used by Other States

Implement safety standards

To prevent unauthorized use of a firearm some states require firearms to be sold with a safety lock, a lock box, or a personalized lock that meets the current California Attorney General's Office recognized standards (see website in resource list below). To prevent unintentional discharge, some states require handguns to have loaded-chamber indicators or magazine safety disconnects. Currently, many firearms that are sold through licensed dealers come with a free trigger or cable lock. People can purchase trigger and cable locks through retail stores. Law enforcement agencies often have free locks. However, since free locks may not be as secure as other methods, they are not the preferred method. Many experts recommend using lock boxes, safes, or firearm vaults with a push button, combination, or digital keypad lock.

Child access prevention laws

Nineteen states have Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws, enacted in the late 1980s to mid 1990's. CAP laws limit children's access to and use of firearms in the home through requiring firearm owners to store their firearms locked or unloaded or both. When children use a household firearm to threaten or harm themselves or others, CAP laws make the person responsible for firearm storage liable, often including a criminal penalty – either a gross misdemeanor or Class C felony.

Laws with felony penalties are shown to be more effective than those with misdemeanor penalties. In states that passed CAP laws, among children younger than 15 years unintentional shooting deaths fell by 23% during the years covered by these laws. Firearm-related homicide and suicide showed modest declines, but were not statistically significant.¹¹

Since 1994, licensed firearm dealers have been required to do criminal and mental health background checks on firearm buyers. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Instant Criminal Background System (NICS), from November 30, 1998, through December 31, 2005, the NICS Section has denied a total of 473,433 firearm sales.¹²

Background checks

Conducting criminal or mental health background checks of buyers, and limiting the number or types of firearms that can be sold and bought at shows are other ways of preventing firearm injuries. Five states (California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, Oregon and Rhode Island) require background checks on all firearms sold at gun shows; three states (Connecticut, Maryland and Pennsylvania) require background checks on handguns sold at the shows.

Background checks are a tool for preventing firearm injuries and deaths. Consistent policies both at the state and local level are needed to ensure background checks take place.

For More Information

Washington State

LOK-IT-UP: A campaign to promote the Safe Storage of Firearms. Posters and brochures available at www.lokitup.org

Washington State Childhood Injury Report

www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/injury/pubs/childhood_injury_report.htm

National

American College of Physician's Firearm Injury Prevention Resource Center

www.acponline.org/firearms/index.html

ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign

www.paxusa.org/ask/index.html

Institute of Medicine. (1999). Reducing the Burden of Injury, Advancing Prevention and Treatment. National Academy Press: Washington, pp 124-137

State of California, Department of Justice, Roster of Firearm Safety Devices Certified for Sale from

<http://ag.ca.gov/firearms/fsdcertlist.php>

Endnotes

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- ¹¹ Cummings, P., Grossman, D.C., Rivara, F.P. & Koepsell T.D. (1997). State gun safe storage laws and child mortality due to firearms. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278 (13), 1084-1089.
- ¹² U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation *Criminal Justice Information Services Division*, National Instant Criminal Background Check System 2005 Report.