

## Prevalence and Impact

- **Frequent Occurrence:** A child unintentionally shoots themselves or others almost daily in the U.S., averaging about 360 incidents annually. From 2015 to 2024, there were over 3,500 unintentional shootings by children aged 17 and younger, resulting in 1,382 deaths and 2,317 injuries.
- **Leading Cause of Death:** Firearms have been the leading cause of death for children and youth aged 0 to 24 in the U.S. since 2017, surpassing motor vehicle crashes.
- **Victims are Often Children:** Over 90% of those wounded or killed in unintentional shootings by children are also under 18 years old. When another person is shot, the victim is most frequently a sibling or friend.

## Demographics of Shooters and Victims

- **Age Groups:** High schoolers (ages 14 to 17) and preschoolers (age five and younger) are the two age groups most likely to unintentionally shoot themselves or others.
- **Preschoolers Driving Increase:** One in every three unintentional shooters were preschoolers. Since 2015, the proportion of shootings by children five and under has increased (+35%), while shootings by high schoolers have declined (-15%). In 2021, a record 150 children ages five and under unintentionally shot themselves or someone else.
- **Gender:** Boys and men are most often both the shooters (79%) and victims (75%) in these incidents.
- **Self-Inflicted vs. Others:** Unintentional shooting deaths and injuries are slightly more likely to be self-inflicted. At least 75% of victims of shootings by children five and younger were those children themselves.

## Circumstances of Shootings

- **Location:** Over 7 in 10 unintentional child shootings occur in or around homes.
- **Time:** These incidents occur most frequently when children are likely to be home: over the weekend (Saturday being the most common day) and during the summer (July having the highest average).
- **Outside the Home:** When shootings occur outside the home, cars are the most likely location, especially for preschoolers. For middle schoolers (ages 11-13), hunting and target-shooting areas are the most common outside-the-home locations.
- **Firearm Type:** Handguns are the most commonly accessed firearms in these shootings, accounting for 86% of incidents where the gun type was known.

## Preventability and Solutions

- **Preventable Tragedies:** Unintentional shootings by children are not accidents but preventable tragedies. They often occur when children gain access to unlocked or unsupervised firearms.
- **Secure Storage:** Secure gun storage is consistently highlighted as crucial for prevention. This includes storing guns unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition.

- **Impact of Secure Storage Laws:** States with secure storage or child-access prevention (CAP) laws have lower rates of unintentional child shootings. Rates were 35% lower in states with "locking laws" compared to states without secure storage laws, and 31% lower in states with "after access laws". Strong CAP laws, particularly those that impose criminal liability for improper storage, are associated with reduced unintentional firearm injuries and youth gun suicide rates.
- **Public Health Issue:** Firearm injury is a major public health problem, and a multi-pronged approach focusing on harm reduction is essential to decrease injuries and deaths.
- **Role of Education and Advocacy:**
  - **Pediatricians:** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that pediatricians routinely discuss firearm safety with families, offer safety devices, and incorporate questions about firearms into patient history.
  - **Media:** News media outlets have an important role in emphasizing safe storage practices, especially when reporting on unintentional firearm injury deaths among young children. However, the inclusion of prevention messaging in media reports is often lacking. When specific prevention messages are included, they often come from law enforcement.
  - **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Campaigns like "Be SMART" and Brady's "End Family Fire" aim to educate adults about secure gun storage and normalize conversations about gun safety.
  - **Schools:** School districts in many states are requiring schools to educate parents about secure gun storage.
- **Challenges in Policy and Awareness:** Despite the effectiveness of CAP laws, research indicates that many gun owners are unaware of them, and these laws have not always resulted in a change in storage practices among gun owners in those states. There is also a significant lack of research funding for firearm injury prevention compared to other causes of death.

## Firearm Incidence Data and Sources

"Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths in Children and Youth: Injury Prevention and Harm Reduction" (Pediatrics - AAP Publications, published November 2022):

- [AAP Report on Firearm Injuries in Kids](#)
- **Key Findings:** This article emphasizes that most firearm-related deaths in younger children (0–12 years) occur in the home (85%). It explicitly recommends storing firearms unloaded, locked, and with ammunition stored separately. The study also discusses that parents often overestimate their child's firearm injury risk and the immediate inconvenience versus likely future benefits of safe firearm storage.
- **Relevance:** Reinforces the in-home risk for young children and highlights the behavioral aspects related to parental storage decisions.

"Preventable Tragedies: Unintentional Shootings by Children" (Everytown Research & Policy, published August 2021, updated data to 2024):

- [Everytown – Not an Accident Report](#)
- **Key Findings:** Nearly one child gains access to a loaded firearm and unintentionally shoots themselves or someone else every day in America, averaging about 360 children a year. More than 7 in 10 unintentional child shootings occur in or around homes. Rates of unintentional shootings by children were significantly lower (34-35%) in states with laws that hold gun owners accountable for unsecured guns. Preschoolers (age five and younger) are one of the two age groups most likely to unintentionally shoot themselves or others.
- **Relevance:** Provides compelling statistics on the frequency and location of these incidents, directly linking the problem to unsecured firearms and the effectiveness of secure storage laws.

**"Gun Safety" (Nationwide Children's Hospital, updated June 2023):**

- [Nationwide Children's – Gun Safety](#)
- **Key Findings:** This resource highlights that millions of children live in homes with guns, and many are stored loaded, unlocked, or both. It states that children as young as 3 years old may be strong enough to pull the trigger of a handgun. In 16% of unintentional firearm deaths among children younger than 13, the gun was mistaken for a toy. It also addresses common parental misconceptions, such as hiding guns or believing children "know better."
- **Relevance:** Directly addresses the physical capabilities of young children and common parental misjudgments, reinforcing the need for comprehensive education on true secure storage.

**"Unintentional Firearm Injury Deaths Among Children and Adolescents Aged 0–17 Years — National Violent Death Reporting System, United States, 2003–2021" (CDC MMWR, published December 2023):**

- [CDC Report on Unintentional Firearm Deaths](#)
- **Key Findings:** This comprehensive CDC report highlights that firearms used in unintentional injury deaths were often stored loaded (74%) and unlocked (76%). Most commonly, these firearms were accessed from nightstands and other sleeping areas (30%). It explicitly states that unintentional firearm injury deaths of children are preventable and that secured firearm storage practices (locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition) are protective factors. The study also shows that "playing with firearm, showing firearm to others" was the most frequent precipitating circumstance for unintentional firearm deaths across all age groups of children.
- **Relevance:** Directly links unsecured storage to child deaths and emphasizes preventability through secure storage.

**"Findings Show Child Access Prevention (CAP) Firearm Storage Policies Reduce Youth Gun Suicide Rates" (Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, published January 2025):**

- [Johns Hopkins on CAP Laws & Youth Suicide](#)
- **Key Findings:** A new study found that Child Access Prevention (CAP) firearm storage policies are associated with reductions in youth gun suicide rates, as well as firearm-related unintentional injuries and homicide in youth ages 1-17. CAP laws were found to be most effective in reducing

youth suicide by firearms when they required firearms to be stored unloaded and locked in a secure device for children aged 16 and younger.

- **Relevance:** Provides strong evidence that specific secure storage laws have a measurable positive impact on reducing child firearm deaths and injuries, supporting the call for responsible ownership.

### Data References

American Academy of Pediatrics. "Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths in Children and Youth: Injury Prevention and Harm Reduction." *Pediatrics - AAP Publications*, Nov. 2022.

Everytown Research & Policy. "Preventable Tragedies: Unintentional Shootings by Children." Aug. 2021, updated data to 2024.

Nationwide Children's Hospital. "Gun Safety." June 2023.

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Unintentional Firearm Injury Deaths Among Children and Adolescents Aged 0–17 Years — National Violent Death Reporting System, United States, 2003–2021." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, Dec. 2023.

Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. "Findings Show Child Access Prevention (CAP) Firearm Storage Policies Reduce Youth Gun Suicide Rates." Jan. 2025.