



## FACTS ABOUT UNINTENTIONAL FIREARM INJURIES TO CHILDREN

**Unintentional shootings account for nearly 20 percent of all firearm-related fatalities among children ages 14 and under, compared with 3 percent for the entire U.S. population.**

- In 2002, 60 children ages 14 and under died from unintentional firearm-related injuries. Children ages 10 to 14 accounted for 57 percent of these deaths. The unintentional firearm injury death rate among children ages 14 and under declined 80 percent from 1987 to 2002.
- In 2003, 231 children ages 14 and under were treated in hospital emergency rooms for unintentional firearm-related injuries; more than 50 percent of these injuries were severe enough to require hospitalization.
- In 2003, nearly 8,300 children ages 14 and under were treated in hospital emergency rooms for unintentional non-powder gun-related injuries (e.g., BB guns, pellet guns).
- The unintentional firearm injury death rate among children ages 14 and under in the United States is nine times higher than in 25 other industrialized countries combined.
- The total annual cost of unintentional firearm-related deaths and injuries among children ages 14 and under is almost \$675 million. Children ages 5 to 14 account for more than \$567 million, or 84 percent, of these costs. Hospital treatment for a firearm-related injury for ages 14 and under averages more than \$28,000 per case.

**Approximately one-third of families with children (representing more than 22 million children in 11 million homes) keep at least one gun in the home.**

- Nearly all childhood unintentional shooting deaths occur in or around the home. Fifty percent occur in the home of the victim, and nearly 40 percent occur in the home of a friend or relative. Presence of a firearm in the home (especially a firearm kept loaded and unlocked) is associated with an increased risk of unintentional firearm fatalities among children.
- An estimated 3.3 million children in the United States live in households with firearms that are always or sometimes kept loaded and unlocked; a recent study in a large metropolitan area reported child access as a contributing cause of 14 percent of all unintentional shootings.
- Forty percent of gun owners keep firearms in the home for protection and crime prevention (40 percent). Guns in the home for protection are more likely to be handguns, found in a home with children, and stored loaded and unlocked.
- More than 70 percent of unintentional firearm shootings involve handguns.
- Unintentional shootings among children most often occur when children are unsupervised and out of school. These shootings tend to occur in the late afternoon (peaking between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.), during the weekend and during the summer months (June to August) and the holiday season (November to December).

### **Unrealistic perceptions of children's capabilities and behavioral tendencies with regard to guns are common.**

- Nearly two-thirds of parents with school-age children who keep a gun in the home believe that the firearm is safe from their children. However, one study found that when a gun was in the home, 75 to 80 percent of first- and second-graders knew where the gun was kept.
- Before age 8, few children can reliably distinguish between real and toy guns or fully understand the consequences of their actions. A recent study found that half of boys ages 8 to 12 who found a real handgun were unsure whether or not it was a toy.
- Children as young as age 3 are strong enough to pull the trigger of many of the handguns available in the United States.
- In a recent controlled experimental study, more than 90 percent of children who found and handled a gun or pulled the trigger reported previously having some type of firearm safety instruction.

### **Certain groups of children are at higher risk for unintentional firearm-related injuries.**

- Male children are far more likely to be injured and die from unintentional shootings than female children. Of those children ages 14 and under who are killed by an unintentional shooting, 82 percent are male.
- Children living in the South have an unintentional shooting death rate that is four and a half times that of children living in the Northeast.
- Rural areas have higher rates of firearm ownership and unintentional firearm-related deaths and injuries than urban and suburban areas. Shootings in rural areas are more likely to occur outdoors and with a shotgun or rifle; shootings in urban areas are more likely to occur indoors and with a handgun.

### **Declines in child firearm- and BB/pellet gun-related injury rates during the 1990s coincided with increased prevention efforts, including legislation and education, aimed at reducing unsupervised access to guns by children.**

- Two safety devices — gun locks and load indicators — could prevent more than 30 percent of all unintentional firearm deaths.
- Product design modifications can prevent unintentional firearm death and injury. Every unintentional shooting in which a child age 5 and under shot and killed himself or another could have been prevented by a safety device.
- To distinguish them from real guns, toy guns must conform to marking requirements under the U.S. Department of Commerce “Marking of Toy Look-Alike and Imitation Firearms” regulation.
- In October 1997, Massachusetts became the first state to issue consumer product safety regulations for guns by establishing safety standards for all handguns made or sold in the state. California and New York have passed similar regulations.
- Eighteen states have enacted child access prevention (CAP) laws, which may hold adults criminally liable for failure to either store loaded firearms in a place inaccessible to children or use safety devices to lock guns.
- State safe-storage laws intended to prevent child access to guns have reduced unintentional firearm-related deaths among children ages 14 and under by an average of 23 percent.