

Some Important Facts

Why are guns a major health threat to youth?

Gun-related death (murder, suicide, and accidental death), is the third leading cause of death in 15–24 year olds in Canada after car accidents and suicide by other means.

Guns kill more children than cancer or than drowning, falls, and fires combined.

Teens are more likely to die from suicide-related gun injuries. Younger children are more likely to be injured by accident.

Guns – do they really protect us?

Researchers have found that the number of gun deaths is related to the level of gun ownership and availability in high-income countries such as Canada.

For every case of gun use for self-protection there are 1.3 accidental deaths, 4.3 murders, and 37 suicides.

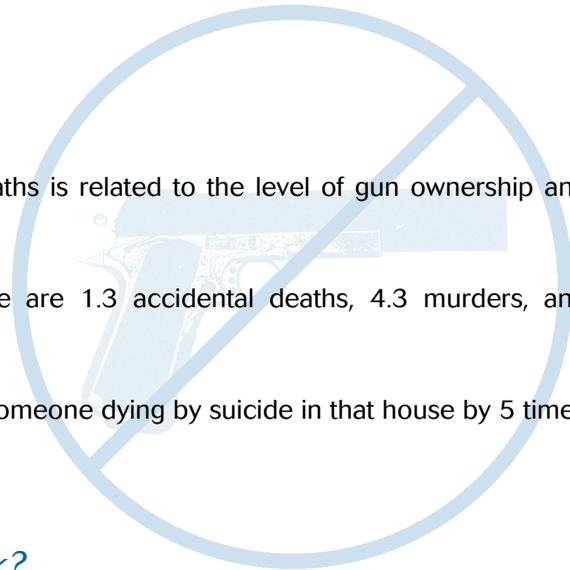
Having a gun in the house increases the chances of someone dying by suicide in that house by 5 times and by 9 times if the gun is kept loaded.

Why are children and teenagers at risk?

It is natural for children to be curious, especially about things that are forbidden. It is important to warn children about the dangers of guns but that may not be enough to protect them.

Teens are going through a stage in their lives that makes them more at risk for gun-related injury. Things like wanting to be like grown-ups, peer pressure, feeling immortal, wanting to be independent, less self-control, and experimenting with drugs and alcohol put teenagers at risk.

Studies have shown that the presence of a firearm in the home increases the likelihood of a successful suicide attempt by an adolescent in that home. In adolescents, suicides are often an impulsive act, and the lack of availability of a lethal weapon may be the crucial factor to make some adolescents reconsider taking their own life.



Prevention

What do parents need to know?

The safest thing for your family is not to keep a gun in the home. If you do have a gun, unload it, lock it with a trigger lock, and keep it in a lock-box or locked cabinet. Keep ammunition in a separate place. NEVER leave a gun loaded or unlocked. Trigger locks and lock boxes can be bought at most gun shops or sporting goods stores. The cost is low and well worth it!

Tell your children that guns are very dangerous and that they should never play with a gun if they find one. If they find a gun, they should let an adult know right away.

Talk to your children about guns and violence. Explain that we all have emotions like anger and fear, but these feelings can be expressed without hurting others or using weapons.

Parents

Show your children healthy ways to express anger and disagreement. Some positive ways to resolve conflict include:

- Talking about feelings rather than acting out.
- Making choices to avoid fights.
- Getting help from trusted adults.

Talk to your children about the differences between television violence and real-life violence. Watch television and movies with your children. Help them understand that what they see is not real. In reality, guns can kill.

Training programs are unlikely to protect your child

Children have not developed the self-control needed to keep from playing with a forbidden object like a gun. This is why gun training programs are unlikely to work for many children and young adults. The safest thing is to not have a gun in your house. If you have to have a gun in the house put it out of reach, unload it and lock it up!

Physicians for
Global Survival (Canada)



Médecins pour
la survie mondiale (Canada)

Physicians for Global Survival (Canada)

Suite 208-145 Spruce Street
Ottawa, ON Canada K1R 6P1

Telephone: 613.233.1982

Fax: 613.233.9028

Email: pgsadmin@web.ca

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"Fake" Guns

"Fake" guns such as air guns, BB guns, pellet guns, replicas and starter pistols are also a problem.

Each year there are over 50 children under 18 who require hospitalization for air gun injuries alone.

Air guns are the leading cause for eye loss due to trauma in children and young adults.

Toy Guns

There is a relationship between the use of toy guns and violent behaviour in children. We suggest emphasizing the following concepts to break the common linkage between guns and power:

- guns are for killing and we do not like killing people or animals
- guns are used by people who do not yet know better ways to deal with conflict

Limit the amount of television violence to which your children are exposed. Explain that gun violence in TV and in the movies is not real; and that in real life children are hurt with guns. Media violence exposure is related to actual violent behaviour in children. We suggest no more than one hour per day total "tube time" (TV or video games) and parental guidance to exclude violence, especially gun violence.

**The following
websites
contain more information
on guns and risks to children:**

Canadian Paediatric Society

"Prevention of firearm deaths

in Canadian children and adolescents"

www.cps.ca/english/statements/AM/am95-01.htm

Canadian Coalition for Gun Control

www.guncontrol.ca

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org

American Academy

of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Facts for Families #37: Children and Firearms

www.aacap.org



Guns & Children: What Parents Need to Know



Peaceful Childhoods Series