



About Firearm Injury and Death

KEY POINTS

- Firearm violence and injuries are a serious public health problem that impact the health and safety of Americans.
- Firearm injuries and deaths are preventable—not inevitable—and everyone has a role to play in prevention.

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Overview

A firearm injury is a wound or penetrating injury from a weapon that uses a powder charge to fire a projectile. Weapons that use a powder charge include handguns, rifles, and shotguns.

Injuries from air- and gas-powered guns, BB guns, and pellet guns are not considered firearm injuries. This is because these types of guns do not use a powder charge to fire a projectile.

There are many types of firearm injuries, which can be fatal or nonfatal:

- **Intentionally self-inflicted:** suicide or nonfatal self-harm injury from a firearm.
- **Unintentional:** fatal or nonfatal firearm injuries that happen while someone is cleaning or playing with a firearm or other incidents of an accidental firing without evidence of intentional harm.
- **Interpersonal violence:** homicide or nonfatal assault injury from a firearm.
- **Legal intervention:** firearm injuries inflicted by the police or other law enforcement agents acting in the line of duty. For example, firearm injuries that occur while arresting or attempting to arrest someone, maintaining order, or ensuring safety.^[A]
- **Undetermined intent:** firearm injuries where there is not enough information to determine whether the injury was intentionally self-inflicted, unintentional, the result of legal intervention, or from an act of interpersonal violence.

Defensive gun use

Although definitions of defensive gun use vary, it is generally defined as the use of a firearm to protect and defend oneself, family, other people, and/or property against crime or victimization.

Estimates of defensive gun use vary depending on the questions asked, populations studied, timeframe, and other factors related to study design. Given the wide variability in estimates, additional research is necessary to understand defensive gun use prevalence, frequency, circumstances, and outcomes.



Keep Reading: [Fast Facts: Firearm Violence and Injury](#)

What CDC is doing

CDC's Injury Center has been the nation's leading public health authority on violence and injury prevention for over 30 years. Firearm violence has tremendous impact on Americans' overall safety and wellbeing.

Important gaps remain in our knowledge about the problem and ways to prevent it. Addressing these gaps is an important step toward keeping individuals, families, schools, and communities safe from firearm violence and its consequences.

Using a public health approach is essential to addressing firearm violence and keeping people safe and healthy. CDC's approach to preventing firearm injuries focuses on three elements:

- Providing data to inform action.
- Conducting research and applying science to identify effective solutions.
- Promoting collaboration across multiple sectors to address the problem.

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- The term *legal intervention* is a commonly used external cause of injury classification. It does not indicate the legality of the circumstances surrounding the death.

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