

The Trace

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Rounds

News and notes on guns in America



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By Kenny]

Gun Safety

·May 21, 2018

Roughly 4.6 Million American Kids Live in Homes With Unlocked, Loaded Guns

A country where one in three households owns guns is a country where a lot of children grow up alongside deadly weapons. New calculations indicate just how many of those kids live in homes where adults fail to safely store their firearms.

According to the analysis, an estimated 4.6 million American children reside in a household where at least one gun is kept loaded and unlocked. The study's authors also determined that the share of child-rearing gun owners who don't secure all their firearms has nearly tripled since the last time similar research was conducted.

The findings were published online on May 10 in the *Journal of Urban Health*, a little more than a week before a gun rampage outside of Houston provided a horrific illustration of the dangers that arise when firearms are left accessible to children and teens.

Kids find guns and unintentionally shoot themselves or others. Unsecured firearms are a leading means of youth suicide. As the nation was reminded last Friday, children also sometimes use their parents' or caregivers' guns to commit homicides or mass murders: The 17-year-old student charged with fatally shooting 10 and wounding 13 more at his high school in Sante Fe, Texas, on Friday reportedly carried out his attack with a shotgun and revolver belonging to his father. A federal analysis of school shootings released in 2004 found that 65 percent of perpetrators used a gun owned by a relative.

The new numbers on kids and unsafely stored guns are the latest takeaways from the National Firearms Survey of 2015, the most comprehensive examination of American gun ownership in 20 years. Led by Deborah Azrael of Harvard and Matthew Miller of Northeastern University, the inquiry measured a dramatic shift in preferences and behaviors, away from rifles owned for hunting or sport-shooting and toward handguns possessed for self-defense.

Overall, the new analysis shows, more gun owners with children in their homes store all their guns unloaded and locked up (29 percent) than leave at least one firearm loaded and unsecured (21 percent). The authors believe that among some gun owners, a perceived need to keep firepower at the ready may trump safer storage practices. Households where respondents said they own at least one gun for self-defense were nearly 10 times more likely to leave a gun loaded and unlocked than those for whom firearms serve recreational purposes.

“The overall story that we see is rather than movement toward safer storage, we see movement away from safer storage and that is problematic,” Azrael says.

The rise in the number of children living with unsecured guns cannot be explained only by general population growth, Azrael and her co-authors write in their paper. While earlier studies employed methodologies that may have depressed estimates of unsafe storage, correcting for those undercounts does not affect the overall upward trend.

Adult gun owners have adopted more dangerous storage habits while a related idea has taken root. Polls show that over the past two decades, Americans have come to believe that gun ownership increases public safety and that a home with guns in it is a more secure one. This belief has been fed by the political and media arms of the National Rifle Association. It is not supported by scientific evidence. To the contrary: a 2014 review of existing research published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that access to guns doubles the risk of homicide and triples the risk of suicide.

Separate studies suggest that shootings by children are among the most preventable forms of gun violence. After spending two years poring over existing assessments of gun laws, researchers at the RAND Corporation found that statutes imposing criminal liability on adults who allow their firearms to fall into kids’ hands have consistently reduced both firearm suicides and accidental shootings among young people. The RAND team concluded that child-access prevention laws — or CAP laws, to works — were the most effective of the 13 categories of laws they examined.

The NRA generally opposes CAP laws or works to water them down. Currently, 28 states and the District of Columbia have CAP laws in place, though the strength of those laws varies considerably.



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Daily Bulletin

·5 hours ago

Daily Bulletin: Guns, Marketed For Self-Defense, Are More Often Used in Suicide, Study Shows

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WHAT TO KNOW TODAY

NEW from THE TRACE: The very essential work of street-level violence prevention. Violence interrupters were already doing valuable work helping underserved communities break cycles of gun violence, David Muhammad of the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform and DeVone Boggan of [Advance Peace](#) write in a new [commentary](#). They argue that these specialists have become even more critical as the coronavirus stretches law enforcement and social service agencies thin. “Like other frontline essential workers, violence prevention specialists are in desperate need of personal protective equipment including masks and gloves,” they write. “They also deserve our acknowledgment, respect and appreciation.” **What our reporters have heard on the ground:**

- Here’s Lakeidra Chavis’s March 17 dispatch on the Chicago gun violence interrupters [doubling](#) as trusted messengers on avoiding infection.
- In Baltimore, J. Brian Charles [looked at](#) how one grassroots anti-violence program is adapting its life-saving ceasefire weekends when peace walks have to be virtual.

Guns are marketed for self-defense but more often used in suicide, a new study shows. Researchers at the University of Washington studied nearly 650 gun deaths that occurred in homes in the Seattle area during a seven-year span. Their [takeaway](#): for every justifiable homicide, there were 44 suicides, seven criminal homicides, and one unintentional death. The findings appear in [JAMA Internal Medicine](#). **Bookmark it: “Will a Gun Keep Your Family Safe? Here’s What the Evidence Says”**

Justice Department warns of the dangers that guns can pose when sheltering in place. In a [blog post](#), the acting director of the Office on Violence Against Women expressed concern that surging gun sales are adding to the threat of domestic violence created by the pandemic’s social isolation and economic stress. She encouraged the secure storage of guns, particularly away from children, and cited NRA [advice](#) that calls for firearms to be stored unloaded. She also cautioned that “a gun should never be handled after consuming alcohol.”

States are also sounding the alarm about increased domestic violence risks — and pointing to solutions. “Unfortunately, home isn’t always a safe place — that’s why it’s crucial that we all have the tools necessary to protect ourselves and our loved ones,” [said](#) California Attorney General Xavier Becerra in highlighting two measures for combating intimate partner violence: domestic violence restraining orders and gun violence restraining orders. San Diego County, which has been a national leader in [using](#) GVROs, [said](#) it’s served 46 of them in the last six weeks — far higher than average.

AGs to Trump administration: Crack down on digital “ghost gun” blueprints. More than two dozen state attorneys general are [arguing](#) that by sharing schematics for undetectable firearms, Texas-based Defense Distributed is violating export control regulations and the Undetectable Firearms Act, which bans guns that don’t set off metal detectors. The same coalition of attorneys general sued the Trump administration in 2018 after it allowed Defense Distributed to post the blueprints, and federal judges have [blocked their release](#) on several occasions. In March, the company [posted them anyway](#), with founder Cody Wilson claiming the file dump complied with the White House’s [new, relaxed rules](#) for gun exports.

An overlooked angle on suicide. Yesterday, we [covered](#) a new toolkit from the Veteran’s Administration, which is helping to spread the message of firearm storage for a veterans population facing elevated suicide risks. But suicide rates among female vets are increasing even faster than for their male counterparts, and [a study](#) last month by researchers at the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center took a deeper look at female veterans’ often ignored perspective on firearms.

DATA POINT

Men made up **93%** of those who legally purchased firearms only to later become prohibited from owning them, according to a recent survey. —[Injury Prevention](#)