

TEN FACTS ABOUT GUN SAFETY IN CHILDREN

Know The Facts; The Next Child You Save May Be Your Own

Fact 1: When children get their hands on guns unsupervised, bad things can happen

"Kids see a ball, they bounce it. They see a gun, they shoot it," says Graham Snyder, MD, an emergency-medicine specialist at WakeMed Health and Hospitals, in Raleigh, North Carolina. "Even young children know exactly what to do with a gun: Point at something and shoot it. That's what they see on TV or in the movies."

Fact 2: Guns hold a unique allure to boys

In a study by Hardy, he left school aged boys in a room with a gun and other desirable objects, and he asked them not to touch these objects. He reported that all participants were significantly more likely to touch the forbidden gun than to touch other forbidden objects (*Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, 2003*).

Fact 3: Parents don't always know what their kids know about and do with guns

In two out of five (or 39%) families where parents say their 5-14 year-olds don't know where guns are stored, the kids say they actually do know the location; and in two out of nine (or 22%) families where parents say their children have never handled guns, the kids say they have, according to Baxley and Miller (*Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 2006*).

Fact 4: Not all gun owners lock their guns at home

Only one in ten (or 12%) gun owners who have children 5-15 years old at home store guns locked and unloaded, according to Connor and Wesolowski (*Pediatrics, 2003*). Vermont does not currently have laws requiring gun owners to safely secure their guns in the environment of children.

Fact 5: It is likely that there are guns in the house where your kids go to visit

Three out of seven (or 42%) households in Vermont have guns, according to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (*Center for Disease Control, 2001*).

Fact 6: A gun is the most deadly and irreversible means for suicide victims of all ages

One in four attempters deliberate for less than 5 minutes, and nine in ten deliberate for less than a day, according to Simon et al. (*Suicide & life-threatening behavior, 2001*). Virtually every other method allows time for the attempter to be rescued, or gives the ambivalent attempter some time to back out mid-attempt if they change their mind. Also, every other method is reversible and less lethal than a firearm so there's greater chance the person won't die in their attempt.

Fact 7: Most suicide survivors do not go on to die by suicide

The majority (89-95%) of suicide survivors do not go on to die by suicide, according to a summary report of 90 studies by Owens et al. (*British Journal of Psychiatry, 2002*). Acute suicidal feelings often pass over time or with changes in life circumstances, treatment, or other support.

Fact 8: Gun safety training and education are inadequate to change gun handling and storage behaviors in kids or adults

Kids who participate in gun safety educational programs are not less likely to play with guns than those who do not participate in these programs, according to Hardy (*Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, 2002*). Also, adult gun owners after gun safety training are twice more likely to keep their guns loaded and unlocked than before the training, according to Nordstrom et al. (*Injury Prevention, 2001*).

Fact 9: The ability to conduct self-defense against criminal intruders is not related to safe gun storage

"There is not a single recorded incident of a person suffering injury from a criminal due to an inability to gain access to a secured firearm. This is true even though 14 states (including three of the nation's four most populous states in California, Florida and Texas) have Child Access Prevention laws", says Cynthia Leonardatos, FBI Special Agent (2001). "Most gun owners lack the ability to effectively use even their negligently stored guns in self-defense". And, there is "a variety of safe storage devices ... to be opened or released in a matter of seconds, even in total darkness".

Fact 10: Gun storage laws to prevent child access save lives

The gun storage law in Florida is associated with 51% reduction (or 52 fewer) in children killed by unintentional shootings over an 8 year post-law period (Webster and Starnes, *Pediatrics, 2000*). Across all 50 states from 1979 to 2000, states with such laws experienced greater declines in youth unintentional firearm death rate than those without (Hepburn et al., *Journal of Trauma-Injury Infection & Critical Care, 2006*). Such laws are also associated with 8.3% reduction in youth firearm suicide rate in 18 states (Webster et al., *JAMA, 2004*). Sensible gun storage laws don't punish law-abiding citizens; they encourage safe gun storage practice and save lives, according to Hepburn et al. (*Public Health and Human Rights Annual Exposition, 2006*) and Grossman et al. (*JAMA, 2005*).

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