

# PROTECT CHILDREN INSTEAD OF GUNS 2000

The latest data released in 2000 show that in a single year 3,761 children and teens were killed by gunfire in the United States — that's one child almost every two and a half hours, 10 children every day, more than 70 children every week. Between 1979 and 1998, gunfire killed nearly 84,000 children and teens in America — 36,000 more than the total number of American soldiers killed in battle in Vietnam. In the United States, firearms outnumber children by a margin of almost three to one. It's time to stop protecting the approximately 200 million firearms in our country and start protecting the nearly 75 million American children and teens under age 19. It's time for a REAL gun safety policy in America. It's time to protect children instead of guns.



#### *The latest deadly facts about children and gun violence in a single year show:*

- 3,761 children and teens were killed by gunfire
- 2,184 were murdered by gunfire
- 1,241 committed suicide with a firearm
- 262 died from an accidental shooting
- 609 were under age 15
- 179 were under age 10
- 83 were under age 5
- Nearly three times as many children under 10 died from gunfire as the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty
- More children and teens died from gunfire than from cancer, pneumonia, influenza, asthma, and HIV/AIDS combined

#### *Other data show:*

- Children are twice as likely as adults to be victims of violent crime and more likely to be killed by adults than by other children
- 61 percent of the nearly 84,000 youths killed by gunfire between 1979 and 1998 were White; 36 percent were Black
- Black children and teens are more likely than Whites to be victims of firearm homicide, while White children and teens are more likely than Black children to use a firearm to take their own life
- Male adolescents are six times more likely than female adolescents to commit suicide with a firearm
- Although White youths commit suicide more often than Black youths, the suicide rate for young Blacks has increased by 75 percent since 1980; according to a report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, firearm suicides accounted for 96 percent of the increase in Black youth suicide between 1980 and 1995
- Homicide is the third leading cause of death among all children ages 5 to 14, and the leading cause of death among Black youths ages 15 to 24

A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a plaid shirt, is smiling broadly. He is sitting at a desk in what appears to be a classroom, with bookshelves and papers visible in the background. The image has a purple tint and a torn-edge effect on the left side.

# Some good news, but we can do better

**B**etween 1994 and 1998, youth firearm deaths dropped 35 percent after peaking in 1994 at 5,793 young lives. Since 1994, the number of Black children and teens killed by guns has decreased 45 percent, and the number of Whites has dropped 28 percent. Although it is encouraging that the number of child gun deaths per year has dropped below 4,000 for the first time since 1988, the number remains disturbingly high. We are still losing too many children. When compared to other industrialized countries, the numbers are even more staggering. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of firearm deaths among children under age 15 is almost 12 times higher in the United States than in 25 other industrialized countries combined. American children are 16 times more likely to be murdered with a gun, 11 times more likely to commit suicide with a gun, and nine times more likely to die in a firearm accident than children in these other countries. The impact of gun violence on children is, in many ways, a uniquely American phenomenon — a shameful distinction for the world's wealthiest and most powerful nation.

## **Homicide — Behind the Decline**

Fifty-eight percent of young people killed by gunfire are victims of homicide. In 1998, homicide accounted for 2,184 deaths among children age 19 and younger. Although the decrease in firearm homicides accounted for most of the decrease in child firearm deaths from 1997 to 1998, not all communities are experiencing the decline. Many large cities, such as New York, Miami, and Boston, have experienced a decline in homicide rates over the last several years, but Baltimore's murder rate has remained stagnant. Underlying this disturbing trend is evidence that gun violence victims in Baltimore are getting younger. In 1999, Johns Hopkins Hospital treated 390 gunshot wounds, more than one a day, and almost two-thirds of the patients were between 15 and 20 years old.

## **Suicide — The Overlooked Crisis**

Although most child gun deaths are homicides, two out of every five young firearm deaths are the result of suicide or an accidental shooting. Thirty-three percent of young people killed by guns take their own lives. In 1998, suicide accounted for 1,241

child and teen firearm deaths — an average of more than three every day. Between 1997 and 1998, the percent of child firearm deaths attributable to homicide declined, but the percentage of firearm suicides deaths increased. Guns are used in two out of three youth suicides and, unlike other attempted methods, are the most likely to be fatal. This is particularly notable considering federal law requires individuals be at least 21 years old to purchase a handgun, and more than 20 states have some minimum age requirement for the possession of rifles and long guns. So, where are children getting these guns? Unfortunately, in most cases, the weapons come from their own homes or from someone they know. More than two-thirds of firearms involved in self-inflicted firearm injuries and deaths come from either the victim's home or the home of a friend or relative.

### Accidental Deaths — The Easiest Tragedy to Prevent

Accidental shootings accounted for about seven percent of child firearm deaths in 1998; 262 children and teens lost their lives in accidental shootings. America loses the equivalent of 25 youth basketball teams each year because a gun was left unlocked, loaded, and too easy for the wrong hands to reach. As with adolescent suicide, a vast majority of firearms used in unintentional shootings of children and teens come from the victim's home or the home of a relative, friend, or parent of a friend of the victim. A study reported in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that 1.4 million homes with 2.6 million children had firearms that were stored unlocked and loaded or unlocked and unloaded but stored with ammunition. A recent survey found that most gun-owning parents store their firearms loaded or unlocked, believing that their child can properly handle a gun and can tell the difference between a toy gun and a real gun.

## AMERICA NEEDS A REAL POLICY ON GUN SAFETY

On Mother's Day 2000, hundreds of thousands of mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, and others gathered on the National Mall in Washington, DC as part of the Million Mom March to urge the country to change fundamentally how guns are regarded and regulated. Hundreds of women shared personal stories of tragedies related to gun violence at the largest public rally against gun violence in the nation's history. These women and their families called on our national leaders to do more to protect our children — not just through greater enforcement of gun crime, but through a comprehensive, national policy to ensure every child's right to a safe, gun-free environment. It's time for a REAL gun safety policy that reaches children in all states. To protect children instead of guns, we must insist on national legislation to:

### Register all firearms and license all gun owners

What does this mean?

- Require gun owners to register their firearms. Much like motor vehicle registration, a registration system for firearms will help police track the transfer of firearms that end up in the hands of children or those who would harm children. Requiring registration at ALL points of sale would ensure that background checks are conducted to make certain that gun buyers are not legally prohibited from owning a firearm. Such a system will help create a heightened responsibility and greater accountability for firearm ownership.
- Require potential gun owners to obtain a license in order to purchase or use a firearm. Much like a driver's license for operating an automobile, a licensing system for gun owners would require applicants to pass competence and safety tests before being allowed to use or own a gun.

Firearm deaths of children and teens, by age, race, and manner, 1998\*

Age	All firearm deaths			Homicide			Suicide			Accident			Unknown Intent		
	All races	White	Black	All races	White	Black	All races	White	Black	All races	White	Black	All races	White	Black
Under 1	5	4	1	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-4	78	45	30	58	32	24	0	0	0	19	12	6	1	1	0
5-9	96	65	25	60	46	11	1	0	1	34	19	12	1	0	1
10-14	430	309	97	191	110	68	153	131	14	68	53	12	18	15	3
15-19	3,152	1,774	1,263	1,870	732	1,075	1,087	907	131	141	102	38	54	33	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,761</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>1,416</b>	<b>2,184</b>	<b>924</b>	<b>1,179</b>	<b>1,241</b>	<b>1,038</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>23</b>

\*Data are for persons ages 0-19. The figures for All races include races other than White and Black. Separate tabulations for these other races are not available from NCHS's unpublished tabulations. Source: National Center for Health Statistics. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

**Firearm deaths, by manner, persons  
ages 0-19, 1979-1998  
(excludes legal intervention)**

	Total	Homicide	Suicide	Accident	Unknown Intent
1979	3,710	1,651	1,220	726	113
1980	3,749	1,743	1,214	689	103
1981	3,589	1,660	1,213	604	112
1982	3,332	1,498	1,207	550	77
1983	2,962	1,238	1,150	504	70
1984	3,030	1,289	1,114	552	75
1985	3,169	1,322	1,256	519	72
1986	3,349	1,513	1,293	472	71
1987	3,400	1,573	1,281	467	79
1988	3,974	1,953	1,387	543	91
1989	4,384	2,367	1,380	567	70
1990	4,935	2,852	1,476	541	66
1991	5,329	3,247	1,436	551	95
1992	5,353	3,336	1,426	501	90
1993	5,715	3,625	1,460	526	104
1994	5,793	3,579	1,565	512	137
1995	5,254	3,249	1,450	440	115
1996	4,613	2,836	1,309	376	92
1997	4,205	2,562	1,262	306	75
1998	3,761	2,184	1,241	262	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>83,606</b>	<b>45,277</b>	<b>26,340</b>	<b>10,208</b>	<b>1,781</b>

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Division of Vital Statistics, Table 292 (unpublished). Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

**How will it help?**

- Registration will increase accountability for firearm owners who transfer or sell their firearm illegally or irresponsibly. Not only will registration help law enforcement's ability to trace weapons used in crime and hold individuals accountable for the illegal use of firearms, it will create a higher standard of responsibility for gun ownership to keep firearms out of the hands of children and those who would harm them.
- Similarly, licensing will ensure that gun owners know how to safely use and store their firearm and understand the consequences of allowing access to weapons by children and individuals not permitted to own or use firearms.
- Both licensing and registration will make it more difficult for the angry or depressed individual to impulsively buy a handgun to harm themselves or someone else. Massachusetts is the only state that has both licensing and registration for all firearms.

**Encourage safe storage laws and mandatory trigger locks**

**What does this mean?**

- Require safety devices, such as trigger locks, be sold with all new guns to prevent children from being able to load and fire them.
- Encourage state legislatures to enact Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws that call for strict penalties for adults who allow children access to firearms regardless of whether injury results.

**How will it help?**

- Safe storage devices, such as trigger locks, can prevent children and teens from accessing and operating firearms. Just five states – California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Hawaii – have passed legislation requiring that safe storage devices be sold with all new gun purchases.
- Safe storage policies help to ensure responsible gun ownership by adults. The estimated number of households with guns is as high as 40 percent, and one out of every three handguns is kept loaded and unlocked. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that twelve states that have enacted CAP laws have witnessed a 23 percent drop in accidental shootings of children between 1990 and 1994. Based on this 1997 study, an estimated 216 children killed in unintentional shootings would still be alive today if CAP laws were in effect in every state. Eighteen states have enacted CAP laws since 1989.

**Apply consumer safety standards to the gun industry**

**What does this mean?**

- The gun industry is currently exempt from any consumer safety features. Toy guns and teddy bears are more regulated and must meet more rigorous safety standards than firearms.

**How will it help?**

- Oversight based on uniform standards will ensure that design flaws are identified and corrected and that simple and often inexpensive safety features, such as devices that show whether the chamber is loaded and internal trigger locks, are incorporated in the manufacture of the firearm. Massachusetts is the first and only state in the nation that has taken steps to impose consumer safety regulations on firearms.

**Limit handgun purchases to one a month**

**What does this mean?**

- In order to combat the practice of "gun-running," where an individual can purchase an unrestricted quantity of firearms and transport them to a state with weaker gun laws, several states have enacted one-gun-a-month policies that limit gun buyers to one gun purchase in a 30-day period.

**How will it help?**

- By prohibiting one-time purchases of multiple firearms, the practice of transporting massive numbers of firearms to illegal markets, known as gun-running, will be significantly curbed. Currently, only four states – California, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia — have a one-gun-a-month law limiting firearm purchases.

**MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD**  
**Tell your elected officials to get REAL**  
**and support a gun safety policy to**  
**PROTECT CHILDREN INSTEAD OF GUNS**

## Firearm deaths of children and teens ages 0-19, by manner, 1996-1998

	Total*			Homicide*			Suicide			Accident			Unknown Intent		
	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
Alabama	104	93	86	59	57	47	25	23	24	14	10	11	6	3	4
Alaska	22	23	16	6	9	3	12	10	10	4	2	3	0	2	0
Arizona	120	117	102	64	53	49	47	52	43	4	5	6	5	7	4
Arkansas	63	55	69	27	28	36	26	18	24	9	7	3	1	2	6
California	672	594	493	508	457	372	108	106	102	52	26	13	4	5	6
Colorado	43	57	60	15	22	29	23	31	26	4	4	4	1	0	1
Connecticut	36	21	23	29	17	15	6	4	6	1	0	2	0	0	0
Delaware	5	7	2	4	2	2	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
District of Columbia	62	65	30	59	59	27	1	4	3	0	1	0	2	1	0
Florida	190	165	154	116	108	80	57	44	65	12	12	8	5	1	1
Georgia	160	129	111	79	70	61	51	35	39	24	20	10	6	4	1
Hawaii	3	3	4	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Idaho	27	26	27	11	2	3	11	21	18	4	3	5	1	0	1
Illinois	308	254	264	263	211	206	33	29	40	7	10	13	5	4	5
Indiana	98	79	92	55	47	57	30	21	27	8	8	7	5	3	1
Iowa	22	33	26	8	8	6	13	20	15	0	3	5	1	2	0
Kansas	53	53	54	24	28	28	22	17	22	7	7	3	0	1	1
Kentucky	52	57	44	23	34	17	20	16	23	9	7	3	0	0	1
Louisiana	192	154	124	133	98	74	43	39	35	15	15	15	1	2	0
Maine	5	13	10	1	3	2	4	10	7	0	0	1	0	0	0
Maryland	106	104	108	88	91	89	13	11	13	3	2	2	2	0	4
Massachusetts	32	24	28	26	17	19	5	6	8	0	0	1	1	1	0
Michigan	157	156	135	96	103	87	42	41	43	13	10	3	6	2	2
Minnesota	56	55	34	25	26	12	21	25	22	6	4	0	4	0	0
Mississippi	77	81	55	38	41	28	19	28	19	18	11	7	2	1	1
Missouri	101	97	89	63	48	52	33	34	32	5	13	4	0	2	1
Montana	20	16	17	4	4	3	12	8	12	3	3	2	1	1	0
Nebraska	28	26	30	8	12	13	17	13	15	3	1	2	0	0	0
Nevada	36	34	48	25	21	26	8	13	20	3	0	1	0	0	1
New Hampshire	7	2	9	1	1	0	6	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	66	53	49	55	43	35	6	7	13	4	3	1	1	0	0
New Mexico	43	40	47	22	22	25	17	14	14	2	3	8	2	1	0
New York	199	146	123	150	107	88	43	33	28	6	4	5	0	2	2
North Carolina	135	92	88	70	45	43	49	37	30	15	9	13	1	1	2
North Dakota	9	8	7	0	0	2	8	8	4	1	0	1	0	0	0
Ohio	126	95	100	75	49	48	31	36	41	17	8	11	3	2	0
Oklahoma	61	82	61	30	48	22	25	29	30	5	3	6	1	2	3
Oregon	39	38	30	9	13	10	24	19	13	6	3	4	0	3	3
Pennsylvania	181	167	123	113	108	79	59	49	34	4	9	4	5	1	6
Rhode Island	6	4	5	5	2	4	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Carolina	78	54	60	39	32	30	27	16	23	9	5	7	3	1	0
South Dakota	10	12	12	1	0	2	9	7	9	0	5	1	0	0	0
Tennessee	123	117	109	66	64	53	32	37	38	23	12	16	2	4	2
Texas	359	377	322	202	194	176	121	139	108	27	39	29	9	5	9
Utah	37	35	32	11	10	12	24	24	19	0	0	1	2	1	0
Vermont	5	4	5	1	2	0	2	1	5	1	0	0	1	1	0
Virginia	109	114	97	54	68	46	43	39	39	12	5	9	0	2	3
Washington	67	83	66	31	35	28	31	36	32	4	8	5	1	4	1
West Virginia	16	23	19	6	9	5	8	10	12	2	3	1	0	1	1
Wisconsin	76	58	53	35	31	30	32	26	18	8	1	5	1	0	0
Wyoming	11	10	9	1	1	1	7	7	6	2	2	1	1	0	1
<b>United States</b>	<b>4,613</b>	<b>4,205</b>	<b>3,761</b>	<b>2,836</b>	<b>2,562</b>	<b>2,184</b>	<b>1,309</b>	<b>1,262</b>	<b>1,241</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>74</b>

\*Total firearm deaths and homicide firearm deaths exclude firearm deaths by legal (police or corrections) intervention and deaths by air rifles.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, unpublished tabulations, Table III: Deaths from 282 selected causes. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.



## America's young people want a REAL policy to protect children instead of guns

A recent poll by Hamilton College found that 9 out of 10 American high school students support key gun safety proposals. The study also found that while students believe that the Constitution protects the right of citizens to own guns, it does not prohibit government regulation of handgun sale and use.

- 96 percent support the registration of all handguns
- 90 percent support the licensing of handgun owners
- 87 percent support trigger lock requirements
- 78 percent support CAP laws
- 65 percent believe that laws governing the sale of firearms should be made more strict

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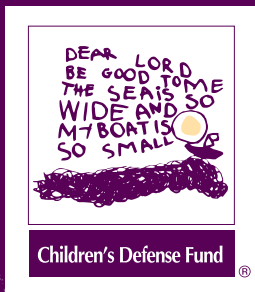
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The mission of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is to *Leave No Child Behind*® and to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investment before they get sick or into trouble, drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown.

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