**Child Firearm Access and Access Prevention Laws in the US**

**Purpose:** To summarize the findings of studies pertaining to child access prevention (CAP) laws and firearm injuries and deaths among children.

**Summary:** In 2012, nearly 12,000 children are injured or killed by a firearm in the US. Studies have consistently shown that children who live in households where firearms are stored safely are less likely to suffer a firearm injury compared to children in households where firearms are stored loaded and/or unlocked. Despite the common limitations of studying the effects of statewide legislation, most studies have found that CAP laws are associated with lower rates of both fatal and nonfatal firearm injuries among children.

**Related Statistics:**
- In 2012, there were 1,940 firearm deaths among youths 0-19 years of age in the US (33% suicide, 5% unintentional, 60% homicide). Thirty of those deaths were in Washington State (18 suicides, 10 homicides, 2 undetermined).¹

- In 2012, there were 9,718 nonfatal firearm injuries among youths 0-19 years of age in the US (21% unintentional, 76% violence related, 3% self-inflicted).¹

- In a 1999 study in King County, WA, more than 75% of guns used in unintentional shootings and suicide attempts among youths 0-19 years of age were stored in the homes of a parent, relative, or friend.²

- Children younger than 3 have the finger strength necessary to fire a gun.³

- In a study of 420 families, 39% of parents who reported that their children did not know the storage location of household guns and 22% of parents who reported that their children had never handled a household gun were contradicted by their childrens’ reports.⁴

- In a study conducted by the Secret Service to identify factors related to school shootings, 68% of attackers acquired the gun from their own home or the home of a relative.⁵
How many US children have access to a firearm in the home?

Study #1: Studied firearm access and mental health diagnoses among a nationally representative sample of US adolescents from 2001 to 2004.\textsuperscript{6}

Findings:
• **1 in 3 US adolescents** reported living in a home with a firearm.
• **41\% of those adolescents** reported the ability to immediately access and shoot a firearm in their home.
• Adolescents with risk factors for suicide, such as depression or a history of suicide attempt, were just as likely to report access to a firearm in the home as adolescents with no suicide risk factors.

Does safe firearm storage prevent firearm injuries among children?

• Studies have consistently observed a higher risk of suicide and unintentional firearm injuries in households where firearms are stored loaded and/or unlocked, compared to households where firearms are stored safely.\textsuperscript{7-10}

Do CAP laws prevent fatal firearm injuries among children?

Study #1: Studied suicides among youths 14-20 years of age from 1976-2001 in 50 US states.\textsuperscript{11}

Findings:
• CAP laws were associated with a modest reduction in firearm-related suicides among 14-17 years of age (**11\% lower suicide rate**).
• These findings were supported by their observation that CAP laws were not associated with lower non-gun suicides, as one would not expect CAP laws to affect non-gun outcomes.

Study #2: Studied unintentional shooting deaths among children 0-15 years of age from 1990-1994 in 50 US states and the District of Columbia.\textsuperscript{12}

Findings:
• Unintentional shooting deaths among children 0-15 years of age fell by **23\%** in the 12 states that had child access prevention laws in effect for at least 1 year.
Study #3: Studied unintentional firearm deaths among children 0-15 years of age from 1979 to 1997 in 50 US states and the District of Columbia.\(^\text{13}\)

Findings:
- CAP laws were associated with a **17% decline in unintentional firearm deaths.**
- Most of this reduction was due to reductions in unintentional firearm deaths in Florida, which allowed felony prosecution of CAP law violators.

Study #4: Studied unintentional firearm deaths among children 0-14 years of age from 1979-2000 in 50 US states and the District of Columbia.\(^\text{14}\)

Findings:
- Overall, unintentional firearm deaths among children 0-14 years of age were declining nationally.
- Unintentional firearm deaths were declining faster in states with CAP laws, particularly those allowing felony prosecution of CAP law violators.

Do CAP laws prevent nonfatal firearm injuries among children?

Study #1 (*Manuscript under journal review*): Studied the association between the strength of states’ child firearm access laws and rates of nonfatal firearm injuries among youths 0-18 years of age in 2010.\(^\text{15}\)

Findings
- States with stricter laws regulating child firearm access prevention had lower rates of self-inflicted (**48% lower incidence rate**) and unintentional (**32% lower incidence rate**) nonfatal firearm injuries.

Questions: Frederick Rivara, MD, MPH ([fpr@uw.edu](mailto:fpr@uw.edu))

[Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center]
REFERENCES


