Firearms

Overview

It is estimated that 40 percent of all homes in the US have some type of firearm, of which one in four is a handgun. Access to firearms in the home increases the risk of unintentional firearm-related death and injury among children. Unintentional shootings cause 20 percent of all firearm-related deaths among children ages 14 and under.

An underestimation of the child's ability to gain access to a firearm in the home is a common problem. In addition, unlike adults, children are unable to distinguish between a real gun and toy guns, and children are not able to make good judgments about how to safely handle a gun.

To keep your child safe from firearms, consider whether it is worth the risk to your child to keep a firearm in your home. If you do choose to keep a firearm, safely store the firearm locked up and out of reach, and keep ammunition in a separate, locked place from the actual firearm. Also, by talking with your child about the dangers of firearms, you can teach your child to never touch or play with guns, and to tell an adult when he/she finds a gun.

Prevention

Firearms are often portrayed on television and in movies as glamorous. In addition, the consequence of firing a firearm may not be portrayed as seriously in the media, because children often see the "shot" actors alive in other movies. Toy guns may add to a child's perception that real guns, like toy guns, are harmless and fun. It is important that your child knows the difference between a real gun and a toy gun.

Although the only sure way to keep your child safe from unintentional firearm-related injury and death in your home is to remove all firearms from the home, there are other ways to improve the safety of your child around firearms.

- **Proper storage**
  Firearms should always be stored unloaded and separate from ammunition. The firearm and ammunition should both be locked away and out of reach of children.

- **Educate your child**
  Teaching your child the dangers of guns may help prevent unintentional firearms-related injuries and death. A parent should teach a child if he/she sees a firearm, to:
  - not touch the firearm
  - leave the area
  - tell an adult immediately

- **Check with neighbors**
  Even if your own home is free of firearms, your child may visit another home where
firearms are kept. Always check with neighbors, friends, and relatives to make sure they safely store their firearms, out of reach of children.

- **Other safety devices**
  Safety devices such as gun locks, lock boxes, and gun safes should be used for every firearm in the house. Safety devices on firearms could prevent most unintentional fatal shootings of children ages 5 and under.

**Identifying High-Risk Situations**

A firearm in the home, whether loaded or not, increases the risk of firearm-related injuries to children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advocates the removal of handguns from areas where children live and play. However, even if your household does not contain a gun, it is likely that your child will come into contact with a firearm at another house, as it is estimated that 40 percent of US homes have a firearm.

Awareness of situations that can increase your child's risk of exposure to unintentional firearms injuries may help prevent them. High-risk situations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Accessible firearms in the home**
  Parents often underestimate their child's ability to gain access to the firearm in the house, or even the child's ability to pull the trigger. Statistics show that 75 to 80 percent of first and second graders, who live in a home with a firearm, know where the firearm is kept. In addition, children as young as 3 may be strong enough to pull the trigger of a firearm.

- **Accessible firearms at another home**
  Even if your home does not contain a firearm, your neighbor, friend, or relative may have an accessible firearm in the house.

- **Adolescent boys**
  The majority of children, ages 14 and under, killed unintentionally by a firearm, are boys (nearly 80 percent). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) considers homes with adolescent boys at a higher risk for unintentional firearm-related injury and death.

- **Ammunition and firearms stored together**
  When a firearm is locked away with ammunition, or left loaded, it greatly increases the risk of unintentional firearm-related injury and death. It is estimated that between one-third and one-half of all firearm owners keep their firearms loaded and ready for use at times.

- **Lack of supervision**
  Most unintentional firearm shootings among children occur during times when children are not supervised, such as during the late afternoon, on weekends, and during summer months.
• **High-risk homes**
  According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), homes that can increase the risk of unintentional firearm-related injury and death include homes where there is alcohol or drug-addicted individuals.

### Injury Statistics and Incidence Rates

The following statistics are from the National SAFE KIDS Campaign:

**Injury and death rates:**
- The number of unintentional deaths from firearms declined 80 percent from 1997 to 2002.
- In 2005, 75 children ages 14 and under died from unintentional firearm-related injuries; more than half of those children were between the ages of 10 and 14.
- Non-powder gun-related injuries (for example, BB guns or pellet guns) sent nearly 7,000 children to hospital emergency rooms for treatment in 2005.

**Where and when:**
- Most unintentional firearm-related deaths among children occur in or around the home; 50 percent at the home of the victim, and 40 percent at the home of a friend or relative.
- The presence of a firearm in the home increases the risk of unintentional firearm-related death among children (especially if the firearm is loaded and kept unlocked).
- Most unintentional firearm-related child deaths involve guns that were loaded and accessible, and occur when children play with the gun.
- More than one-half of firearm owners keep their firearms loaded and ready for use some of the time.
- Most unintentional shootings among children occur in the late afternoon, on the weekend, during summer months, and during the holiday season, when children are most likely to be unsupervised.
- Rural areas have higher incidences of unintentional firearm-related injuries, as well as higher rates of firearm ownership.

**Who:**
- Approximately 3.3 million children in the US live in households with firearms that are, at times, kept loaded and unlocked.
- Boys are more likely to suffer unintentional firearm-injuries or die from an unintentional shooting than girls. Nearly 80 percent of children ages 14 and under who die from unintentional shootings are boys.
- As many as 75 percent to 80 percent of first and second graders know where their parents’ gun is kept.
- Some 3-year-olds are strong enough to pull the trigger of many handguns.

*Available online at [www.musckids.com](http://www.musckids.com)*

This handout was developed to help individuals understand more about injury prevention measures. It is meant to be used as a guide. Please consult the manufacturer’s instructions and/or your healthcare provider if you have any questions.