



Support new statewide firearm safe storage education & awareness initiative

During the past decade, firearm deaths to children have been on the rise and skyrocketed in 2020 and 2021. In recent years there has

been a surge in gun sales, elevating the risks of more guns in homes that are not safely stored and accessible to curious young children or youth who may be at risk of harming themselves or others. A 2021 survey showed 30% of North Carolina high school students reporting that it would take them less than an hour to get and be ready to fire a loaded gun without a parent or other adult’s permission.ⁱ

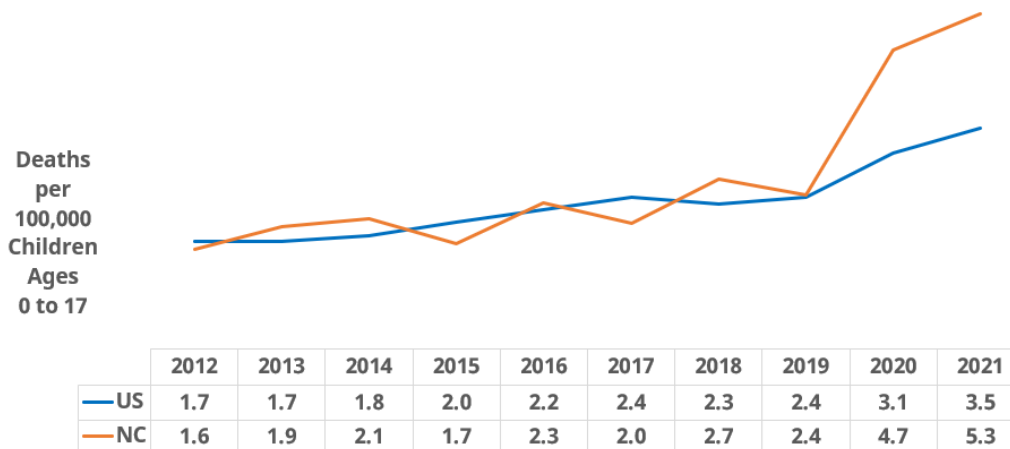
Concern about access to firearms in the context of youth suicide

was brought to the attention of the Child Fatality Task Force by the State Child Fatality Prevention Team that reviews child deaths. A diverse group of stakeholders informed this recommendation for a statewide firearm safe storage awareness initiative.

Evidence is clear that reducing access to guns saves lives. A study

published in JAMA Pediatrics in 2019 estimated that up to 32% of suicide and unintentional youth firearm deaths could be prevented through safe storage of firearms in homes with youths.ⁱⁱ A person’s decision to attempt suicide is often made quickly during a short-term crisis, and if that person has access to a firearm, their attempt is much more likely to be fatal than with other common methods of suicide. The fact that a suicide attempt is made does not mean that the person is likely to die from suicide: around 90% of those who attempt suicide and survive do not go on to die by suicide later. [See “[Means Matter](#)” website of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health for summarized studies on this topic.]

The rate of youth firearm deaths in NC increased 231% between 2012 and 2021. (121 deaths in 2021 alone*)



*Firearm deaths include the following ICD mortality codes : W32-W34 (Unintentional), X72-X74 (Suicide), X93-X95 (Homicide), U014 (Terrorism), & Y22-Y24 (Undetermined Intent)

Source: NC State Center for Health Statistics & National Center for Health Statistics

From 2012 through 2021 there were over 600 North Carolina children killed by firearms.

More than half of all gun owners store at least one gun unsafely.

Most guns used in youth suicide and school shootings come from home.

Firearms were the lethal means used in more than 70% of youth suicides and homicides in 2021 in NC.

Child firearm injury hospitalizations increased by 120% from 2016-2020, and child emergency department visits for firearm injury increased by 68% from 2017-2021.

Task Force recommendation: *SUPPORT legislation to launch and fund a new statewide firearm safety initiative, as recommended by the 2017 Firearm Safety Stakeholder group, that is focused on education and awareness surrounding firearm safe storage and distribution of free gun locks with minimum two-year funding of \$250,000.*

Outreach and technical assistance to help communities launch local initiatives tailored to their needs is critical. The initiative being recommended by the Task Force utilizes but goes beyond and differs from a media campaign, focusing on resources and dedicated state-level injury prevention staff who would provide tools, outreach and technical assistance to help communities launch locally-tailored initiatives across the state.

Educating adult gun owners about safe storage is the target of this initiative. Efforts to educate youth about gun safety will not be sufficient to prevent harm to youth who are at risk of intentionally harming themselves or others. Also, studies have shown that teaching young children gun safety does not reduce the likelihood that children will handle guns when they are unsupervised.ⁱⁱⁱ While educating youth about the dangers of carrying guns and having programs to prevent gun violence by youth are important, this was not the recommended primary focus from the stakeholder group who informed this recommended safe storage initiative.

Task Force efforts on this issue included study and input from a diverse group of stakeholders whose work in 2017 informed the CFTF recommendation for this initiative. This group of stakeholders had input and representation from the following organizations and areas of expertise:

- City Police Chief
- Department of Public Instruction
- Durham Gun Team
- Hunter educator
- Injury & Violence Prevention Branch, Division of Public Health
- Juvenile Justice Health Services
- National Rifle Association
- NC Child Fatality Prevention Team
- NC Child Fatality Task Force
- NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- NC Department of Justice
- NC Wildlife Officer
- North Carolinians Against Gun Violence
- Pediatrician with expertise in child safety
- Safe Kids NC
- UNC Injury Prevention Research Center
- Academic researcher

The Child Fatality Task Force is a legislative study commission that recommends policy solutions to prevent child death, prevent abuse and neglect, and support the health and safety of children.

Website: <https://sites.ncleg.gov/nccftf/>

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ⁱ 2021 NC Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

ⁱⁱ Monuteaux MC, Azrael D, Miller M. Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage With Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2019;173(7):657–662. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1078

ⁱⁱⁱ This was the conclusion by a Rutgers University study that reviewed ten studies on the effectiveness of strategies for teaching gun safety to children ages 4 to 9. The study noted that although gun safety education for children has value, safe gun storage may be the better choice for protecting children and adolescents from gun injuries. Holly C., Porter S., Kamienski M., Lim A. School-Based and Community-Based Gun Safety Educational Strategies for Injury Prevention. *Health Promotion Practice.* May 2018. DOI: 10.1177/1524839918774571.

*This number of 121 is different than data presented at Task Force meetings in 2022 because the data presented at Task Force meetings was provisional whereas this 121 number is from finalized data. A previously posted fact sheet incorrectly stated 120 instead of 121.