

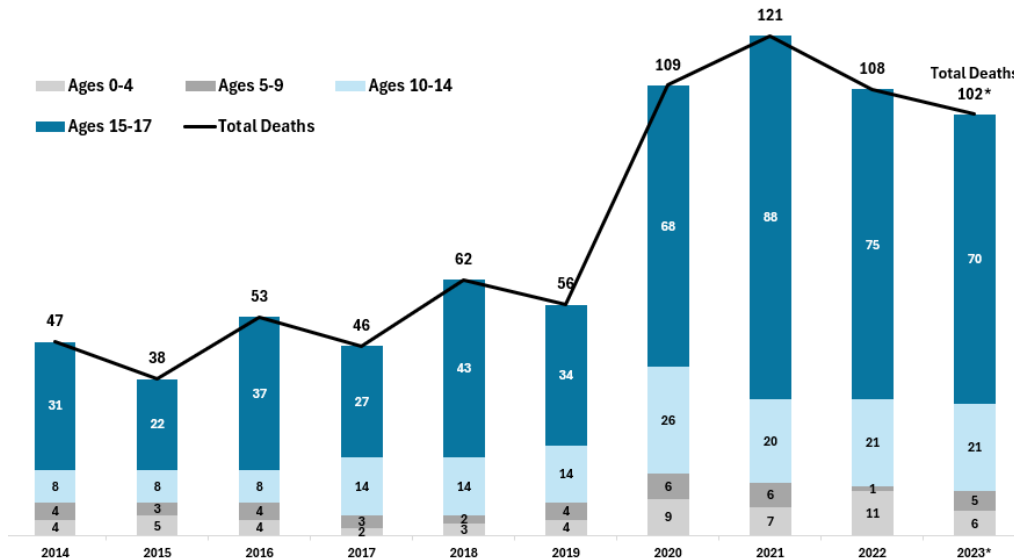


Child Fatality Task Force Recommendation

Support recurring funding to sustain the NC S.A.F.E. initiative and strengthen NC's child access prevention law to prevent firearm deaths and injuries to kids

Firearm deaths to NC children have more than doubled since 2014¹

Child Deaths Due to Firearms for NC Children Ages 0 to 17, 2014-2023*



*2023 numbers are provisional and may change. Data source: NC State Center for Health Statistics; deaths include homicides, suicides, unintentional, and undetermined firearm deaths.

Evidence is clear that guns are often not stored safely and that reducing access to guns saves lives. A 2021 survey indicated that more than 2/5 of North Carolina adults have a firearm in or around the home, and over half of firearms that are stored loaded are also unlocked.² Studies have shown that most kids know where parents keep their guns, but parents often think they don't.³ A study in JAMA Pediatrics estimated that up to 32% of suicide and unintentional youth firearm deaths could be prevented through safe storage of firearms in homes with youths.⁴

Firearms are the leading cause of injury death for North Carolina children and youth, surpassing even motor vehicle deaths. In 2023 among older teens ages 15 to 17, firearms were the lethal means used in almost 95% of homicides and almost 50% of suicides.

Sustained funding for firearm safety initiative: The NC S.A.F.E. (Secure All Firearms Effectively) statewide initiative is operating through temporary federal funds but the need to educate gun owners is ongoing. This initiative, which has roots in a Child Fatality Task Force recommendation, involves multiple media strategies to encourage firearm safe storage, toolkits and flyers for various community-level prevention efforts, and the purchase and distribution of gun locks and gun safes. Media formats include radio, DMV screens, billboards, gas station pumps, bus wraps, etc., and public service announcements. Digital ad channels have included Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Nextdoor, Google Search, connected TV, and more. Over 50,000 gun locks and hundreds of gun vaults have been distributed since 2023. The next phase of this initiative adds a focus on securing firearms in vehicles, suicide

In the five year-period between 2019 and 2023, nearly 500 North Carolina children ages 17 years and younger died from firearm injuries, which is double the number of firearm deaths from the prior five-year period.

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.

About 30% of NC middle and high school students report 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.

prevention, and a broad school-focused initiative which is already underway. **Funding needed to sustain the NC S.A.F.E. initiative is \$2.16 million recurring.**

Strengthen law to protect kids: State laws that address access to guns by children and hold gun owners accountable for unsafe storage, often called “child access prevention laws,” are proven to be an effective tool to prevent gun deaths and injuries to kids.⁵ Such laws vary among states, and North Carolina enacted its child access prevention law in 1993 which has since remained unchanged. Among states, NC has the 12th highest rate of gun deaths for children and youth ages 1-19.⁶ **North Carolina’s current child access prevention law applies only to a gun owner or one who possesses a gun who “resides in the same premises as a minor.” The recommended change from the Task Force is to remove this phrase about residing with a minor from the law** (see highlighted language below).

A person who owns or possesses a gun who does not reside in the same premises as a minor may nevertheless be in situations where, for example, a child or teen (e.g., grandchild, nephew, student, or neighbor) is visiting their home or riding in their car, and if their gun is not safely stored, the risks of what can happen when a child or teen accesses that gun are no different than they are for someone who resides with a child. Note that the law only applies under specific circumstances as stated in [N.C.G.S. § 14-315.1](#) where the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised minor would be able to gain access to the firearm and under other specific circumstances; see below.

CFTF Recommended Change to Strengthen NC’s Child Access Prevention Law:

§ 14-315.1. Storage of firearms to protect minors.

(a) Any person who **resides in the same premises as a minor**, owns or possesses a firearm, and stores or leaves the firearm (i) in a condition that the firearm can be discharged and (ii) in a manner that the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised minor would be able to gain access to the firearm, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor if a minor gains access to the firearm without the lawful permission of the minor's parents or a person having charge of the minor and the minor:

- (1) Possesses it in violation of G.S. 14-269.2(b);
- (2) Exhibits it in a public place in a careless, angry, or threatening manner;
- (3) Causes personal injury or death with it not in self defense; or
- (4) Uses it in the commission of a crime.

(b) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a person from carrying a firearm on his or her body, or placed in such close proximity that it can be used as easily and quickly as if carried on the body.

(c) This section shall not apply if the minor obtained the firearm as a result of an unlawful entry by any person.

(d) "Minor" as used in this section means a person under 18 years of age who is not emancipated.

The North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force is a legislative study commission that is mandated by state law to recommend policy solutions to state leaders to prevent child death and promote child safety and well-being.

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

Executive Director: Kella Hatcher, kella.hatcher@dhhs.nc.gov

Co-Chairs: Karen McLeod, kmcleod@benchmarksnc.org & Jill Cox, JCox@cisnc.org

¹ This includes homicides, suicides, unintentional, and undetermined firearm deaths. Source: NC State Center for Health Statistics & CDC/National Center for Health Statistics.

² Information presented to the NC Child Fatality Task Force by the NC Division of Public Health, sourced from the 2021 North Carolina Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System, Firearm Safety Module: <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/brfss/2021/nc/all/topics.htm#fr>.

³ Baxley F, Miller M. Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2006;160(5):542–547. doi:10.1001/archpedi.160.5.542.

⁴ 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

⁵ Villarreal, S., Kim, R., Wagner, E., Somayaji, N., Davis, A., & Crifasi, C. K. (2024). Gun Violence in the United States 2022: Examining the Burden Among Children and Teens. Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2024-09/2022-cgvs-gun-violence-in-the-united-states.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.