



Child Fatality Task Force Recommendation

Support new statewide firearm safe storage awareness initiative

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.

During the past decade, firearm deaths to children have been on the rise and skyrocketed in 2020.

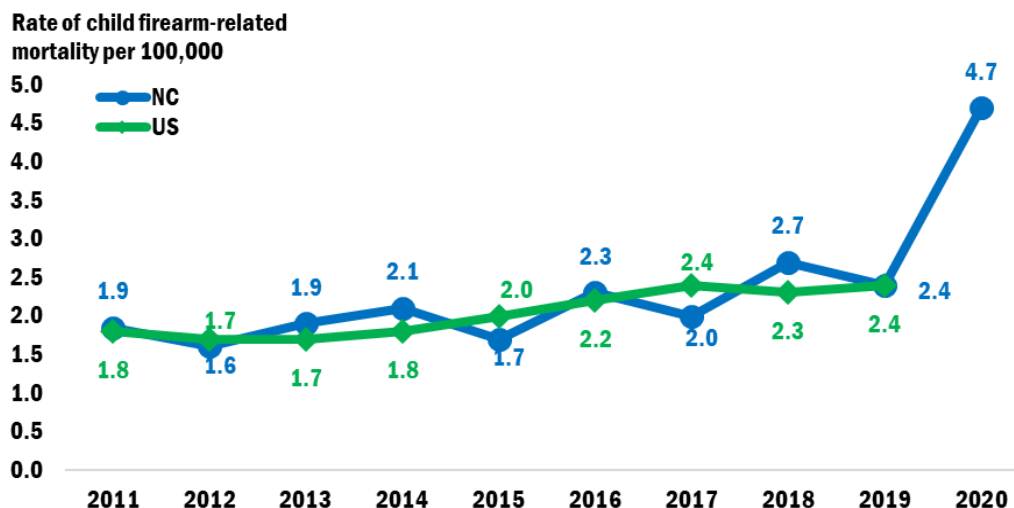
During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a surge in gun sales, elevating the risks of more guns in homes that are not safely stored and accessible to youth who may be at risk for suicide or to curious young children.

Evidence is clear that reducing access to guns saves lives. A study published in JAMA Pediatrics in 2019 estimated that up to 32% of youth firearm deaths could be prevented through safe storage of firearms in homes with youths.ⁱ Many suicide attempts are hastily decided upon and involve little or no planning, and 90% of those who attempt suicide and survive do not go on to die by suicide later. About 85% of attempts with a firearm are fatal compared to much lower lethality rates of many of the most widely used suicide attempt methods. [See “Means Matter” website of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health for summarized studies on this topic.]

Outreach and technical assistance to help communities launch local initiatives tailored to their needs is critical. Central to this initiative is the need to provide resources, customizable tools, gun locks and information on other safe storage methods, as well as one-on-one outreach and technical assistance across the state to help local communities launch their own firearm safety initiatives. Local community mobilization initiatives that can be tailored to a community’s needs are likely to have the best chance of getting people to engage in safe storage practices.ⁱⁱ

Firearm-related mortality rates nearly doubled in NC from 2019-2020

Firearm-Related Mortality Rates Among Children Ages 0 – 17: US & NC, 2011-2020



In the ten-year period of 2011 to 2020,

525 children & youth (ages 0-17) in NC died from firearm-related injuries.

In 2020 alone there were:

- **105 deaths** (including 31 suicides)
- almost **200 hospitalizations**
- over **435 emergency department visits related to firearms for NC children.**

1/2 In North Carolina, firearms are used in about **half of youth suicides** and more than **half of youth homicides.**

1/2 National studies show that **more than half of all gun owners store at least one gun unsafely** and most kids know where parents keep their guns.

A national study showed that **more than 75% of**

75% **guns used in suicide attempts and unintentional injuries of kids were stored in the home of the victim, relative, or a friend.**

Guns used in American mass school shootings often come from home.

Bipartisan support for a bill still eligible for consideration in 2022: Legislation to accomplish the Task Force recommendation to launch and fund a two-year statewide firearm safe storage initiative has been introduced in two legislative sessions and received strong bipartisan support, but has so far not become law. The firearm safety initiative was included in the 2019 Appropriations Act which never became law. In 2021, the initiative was addressed in **HB 427, which passed the House on a vote of 116 to 1** and was also included in the House version of the budget, but was not included in the final Appropriations Act of 2021. The amount of funding in HB 427 is \$86,500 nonrecurring year one and \$69,200 nonrecurring year two, which is the *minimal* amount needed for a two-year initiative that would be implemented through the Injury and Violence Prevention Branch of the NC Division of Public Health.

Educating adult gun owners about safe storage is the target of this initiative: This recommendation arose from concerns about youth suicide. Efforts to educate youth about gun safety will not be sufficient to prevent access to lethal means by a youth at risk for suicide. 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

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 safety and well-being of children.

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ⁱ 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

ⁱⁱ See, e.g., Klassen TP, MacKay JM, Moher D, Walker A, Jones AL. Community-based injury prevention interventions. *Future Child.* 2000 Spring-Summer;10(1):83-110. PMID: 10911689 (this article systematically reviewed 32 studies that evaluated the impact of community-based injury prevention efforts on childhood injuries, safety behaviors, and the adoption of safety devices).

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.