



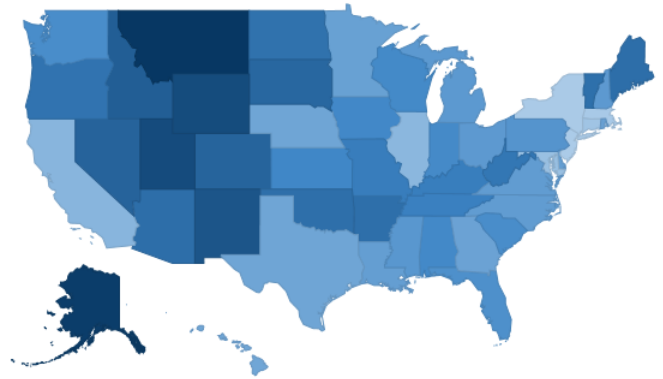
Working for Freedom from Gun Violence

Suicide in Colorado

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The CDC reported that Colorado ranks 7th highest in the nation with 19.1 persons per 100,000 dying of suicide in 2013; 22.7 persons per 100,000 in persons over 65 years of age, and 18.3 / 100,000 for persons between 15 and 24 years of age. Data have shown that white males are most at risk for suicide in all age groups. The death rate from suicide is higher than that for homicide, car crashes, diabetes, breast cancer, flu or pneumonia. This is similar to, but higher than, the rates for the country as a whole where suicide is the overall 10th leading cause of death accounting for more years of life lost than any other cause, except cancer and heart disease. In the nation, suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in youth between 15 and 19

and the 12th leading cause of death in children aged 12 and under. (In the map of the U.S. below, states with darker blue color have higher suicide rates.)



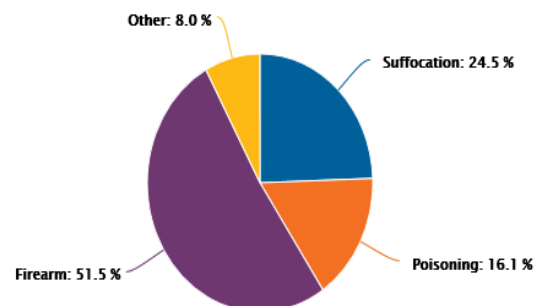
Reducing Suicide

These figures are alarming and we need to ask ourselves what we can do to reduce these tragic and unnecessary deaths. The avenues for reducing suicide start with timely and appropriate mental health care for those showing early signs of suicide thoughts and other major risk factors such as substance abuse, mental health problems, hopelessness, worthlessness, or self-hatred. Beyond that there are other studies that link social and legal factors to the suicide rates. For example, studies have shown that many suicide attempts are unplanned and occur during an acute period of distress; therefore, restricting access to lethal methods, such as firearms, during those crisis times is a key suicide prevention strategy.

Firearm Suicide

One important factor related to suicide, particularly successful suicide rather than suicide attempts, is the use of a firearm. In 2013, firearms were the most common method of death by suicide, accounting for a little more than half (51.4%) of all suicide deaths. Almost 2/3 of completed teenage suicides in 2013 were by firearm. Firearm suicide attempts are fatal 90% of the time. Because suicide attempts are usually impulsive acts, easy access to firearms is a significant factor in suicide fatalities. Research studies spanning 20 years found firearms in the home were associated with higher rates of suicide.

Suicide Deaths by Method, 2013



Highcharts.com

The greater availability of firearms in rural parts of the country also contributes to higher suicide rates in the more rural Western states. States with the highest suicide rates are all located in the northwest quadrant of the United States. These states tend to have more firearms per person, have higher concentrations of white people, and have more rural areas.

Reducing Firearm Suicide

While reducing gun deaths in all age groups is important, actions to reduce suicide in young people are crucial and there is strong research showing successful methods to do that. In 2004, we learned that state child access prevention laws requiring safe storage of firearms reduced suicides by 10.8% in the 14-17 year age group.¹ A large pediatric clinic identified their gun owning families and instituted counseling on safe storage and gave each family a discount coupon for a gun lock. Their subsequent actions in regard to gun storage safety were tracked and compared with a control group that only received a brochure. The intervention had a significant impact on behavior, with nearly 2/3 of those families improving their safe storage.² In comparison, another study published the same year showed no impact for a broadly focused community-wide media campaign on safe storage.³

Suicide rates for all groups were markedly lower in states with laws that: (a) required waiting periods for purchasing guns, (b) had universal background checks, (c) required gun locks, (d) had open carry regulations, (e) required license or permit-to-purchase for handguns, and (f) registration of handguns.^{2,3} In addition, a recent study compared suicide rates in states who had changed their permit-to-purchase laws. Connecticut instituted these laws in 1995 and firearm suicide rates dropped 15.4% in years following; meanwhile, Missouri repealed its laws in 2007 and firearm suicide rates increased 16%.⁴

Based on this evidence, access to guns should be more tightly regulated, especially for young people, those who are mentally ill, and those at high risk of suicide. Colorado should consider some of the education and legal changes other states have made. Safe Storage of all guns in the home would help keep lethal firearms out of the hands of distressed young people contemplating suicide. Because suicide is often an impulsive action, requiring waiting periods and permits to purchase handguns would allow a cooling off period and reduce firearm suicides in adults of all ages.

1. Webster, D.W., Vernick, J.S., Zeoli A.M., & Manganello JA. (2004). Association between youth-focused firearm laws and youth suicides. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 292 (5), 594-601.
2. Carbone PS, Clemens CJ, Ball TM. (2005). Effectiveness of gun-safety counseling and a gun lock giveaway in a Hispanic community. *Archives Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 159(11):1049-54.
3. Sidman EA, Grossman DC, Koepsell TD, D'Ambrosio L, Britt J, Simpson ES, Rivara FP, Bergman AB. (2005). Evaluation of a community-based handgun safe-storage campaign. *Pediatrics*, 115 (6), 654-61.
4. Anestis MD, Khazem LR, Law KC, et al (2015). The association between state laws regulating handgun ownership and statewide suicide rates. *American Journal of Public Health*, epub ahead of print. August 22, 2015.
5. Anestis, MD., Anestis, JC. (2015). Suicide rates and state laws regulating access and exposure to handguns. *American Journal of Public Health*, epub ahead of print. August 22, 2015.
6. Crifasi, CK., Meyers, JS, Vernick, JS, Webster, DW. (2015). Effects of changes in permit-to-purchase handgun laws in Connecticut and Missouri on suicide rates. *Preventive Medicine*, epub before print. August 22, 2015

Other information Sources

<https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/facts-and-figures>

<http://www.livescience.com/44615-suicide-help.html>

<http://www.suicidology.org/resources/facts-statistics>