



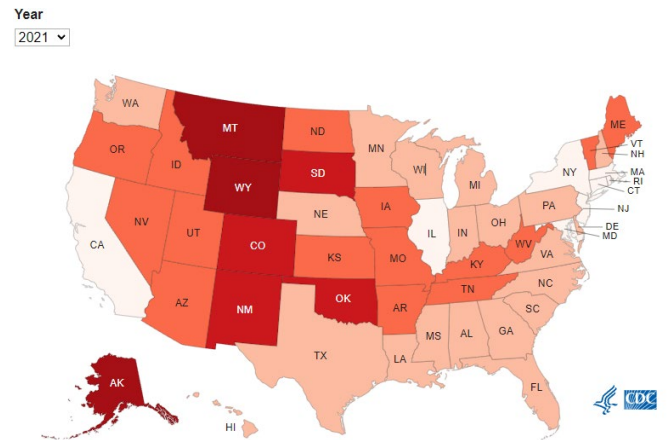
Suicide in Colorado

Legislative Action – Working for Freedom from Gun Violence

Suicide in Colorado

The CDC reported that Colorado ranked 6th highest in the nation suicides in 2021. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment reported 23.6 persons per 100,000 dying of suicide in 2021; 27.1 persons per 100,000 in persons over 65 years of age, and 23.2 / 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 in Colorado 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 12th leading cause of death. ¹ In 2020 nationally, suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death in youth

between 10 and 14.² (In the map of the U.S. below, states with darker red color have higher suicide rates.)



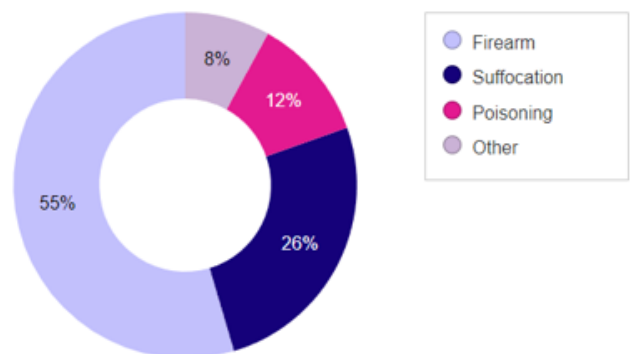
Reducing Suicide

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 fatal suicide attempts, is the use of a firearm. In 2021, firearms were the most common method of death by suicide, accounting for more than half (55%) of all suicide deaths. Firearm suicide attempts are fatal 82.5% of the time.³ Because suicide attempts are usually impulsive acts, easy access to firearms is a significant factor in suicide fatalities. Means matter. Research shows that 90% of firearm suicides occur among members of gun-owning households, even though only 20% of their suicide attempts were with firearms.

Suicide by Method (2021 CDC)



Among non-owning households, only 1% of suicide attempts were with firearms.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ In comparison, another study published the same year showed no impact for a broadly focused community-wide media campaign on safe storage.⁷

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.^{6,7} 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%.⁸

In 2021, Colorado (at long last, attempts went back to the 1990's) enacted a law requiring that gun owners safely store firearms so that juveniles and prohibited persons not gain access; failure to do so can result in a misdemeanor offense. Safe Storage of all guns in the home would help keep lethal firearms out of the hands of distressed young people contemplating suicide. In 2023, Colorado enacted a 3-day waiting period (effective 10/1/2023), which can provide an impediment as suicide is an impulsive act.

1. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html#:~:text=Suicide%20affects%20people%20of%20all,%2D14%20and%2020%2D34.>
3. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/case-fatality/>
4. Hemenway, D. (2019) Comparing gun-owning vs non-owning households in terms of firearm and non-firearm suicide attempts. *Preventive Medicine*, 119.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.

Other information Sources

<https://www.afsp.org>

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