

Children's Defense Fund

Protect Children, Not Guns

The Truth About Guns



April 24, 2013

- 1. A gun in the home increases the risk of homicide, suicide, and accidental death.** Contrary to what many people believe, having a gun in your home doesn't make you safer but instead endangers you and your loved ones. A gun in the home makes the likelihood of homicide three times higher,¹ suicide three to five times higher,^{2,3} and accidental death four times higher.⁴ For every time a gun in the home injures or kills in self-defense, there are 11 completed and attempted gun suicides, seven criminal assaults and homicides with a gun, and four unintentional shooting deaths or injuries.⁵
- 2. Many children live in homes with loaded and unlocked guns. Every parent and grandparent needs to be careful where their children play and ask if there is a gun in the home.** One-third of all households with children younger than 18 have a gun and more than 40 percent of gun-owning households with children store their guns unlocked.⁶ Twenty-two percent of children with gun-owning parents handled guns in their homes without their parents' knowledge.⁷ More than half of youth who commit suicide with a gun obtain the gun from their home, usually a parent's gun.^{8,9}
- 3. Guns make violence more deadly.** Contrary to what the gun industry says, guns do kill people. Guns make killing easy, efficient, and somewhat impersonal, thereby increasing the lethality of anger and violence.¹⁰ *An estimated 41 percent of gun-related homicides and 94 percent of gun-related suicides would not occur if no guns were present.*³ On the same day as the Newtown massacre a man attacked children with a knife at an elementary school in China. Twenty-three children were injured, but none died.¹¹ In family and intimate assaults the use of a gun increased the risk of death by a factor of 12.¹²
- 4. Virtually anyone can buy a gun without a background check.** Federal law requires that anyone purchasing a firearm from a federally licensed dealer submit to a background check. But private sales, like many sales at gun shows and increasingly on the internet, do not require a background check. This is a loophole used by many people who could not pass a background check. In 2009, undercover stings at gun shows in Nevada, Ohio, and Tennessee revealed that 63 percent of private sellers sold guns to purchasers who stated that they would be unable to pass a background check.¹³ A 2011 study of internet gun sales found that 62 percent of sellers agreed to sell a gun to a buyer who said he probably couldn't pass a background check.¹⁴
- 5. Common sense gun safety laws help reduce gun violence while protecting the legal use of guns.** The following gun safety laws have all been found to be effective in reducing gun violence and factors associated with gun violence. None of these regulations prevent law-abiding citizens from owning guns.

- Tighter regulation and oversight of gun sellers. A study using crime gun trace data from 54 U.S. cities found that diversion of guns for use in crimes is much less common in states:
 - that license retail gun sellers;
 - that require careful record-keeping that can be reviewed by law enforcement;
 - that require potential gun buyers to apply for a license directly with a law enforcement agency; and
 - where law enforcement agencies conduct regular compliance inspections.¹⁵
- Requiring background checks for purchases through private sellers as well as licensed dealers. Since the implementation in 1994 of the Brady Law, which instituted a federal background check requirement for sales through licensed dealers, 2.1 million firearm purchase applications have been denied.¹⁶ A recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that states with background checks on private sales had 16 percent lower firearm fatality rates.¹⁷
- Firearm prohibitions for high-risk groups. A study in California found that denial of handgun purchase to people who have committed violent misdemeanors was associated with a decrease in risk of arrest for new gun and/or violent crimes.¹⁸
- Child access prevention laws. Studies of child access prevention laws, which require gun owners to store their guns so that children and teens cannot access them unsupervised, have found these laws reduce accidental shootings of children by as much as 23 percent¹⁹ and suicides of adolescents by 8 percent.²⁰
- Well-designed assault weapons ban. An Australian law banning semi-automatic and pump-action rifles and shotguns and buying back banned weapons was associated with decreased suicide and homicide rates and with the absence of any mass shootings in the decade following the law (compared to 11 mass shootings in the prior decade).²¹

6. **Universal background checks will not lead to a registry of gun owners.** The Brady Law of 1994 explicitly bans the creation of a registry of gun owners.²² Under the law, instant criminal background checks have been made on over 100 million gun sales in the last decade, without leading to the formation of any gun registry.²³

7. **Loopholes in prior gun safety laws prevented them from being as effective as necessary.** The 1993 Brady Law, which required federal background checks for guns purchased from licensed retailers, did not require such checks for guns bought through private sales.²⁴ The 1994 ban on assault weapons and large capacity magazines did not apply to weapons and magazines manufactured prior to the ban, allowed importation of rifles that could accept large capacity magazines, and allowed the manufacture and sale of “copycat” assault weapons with only small differences from banned models.²⁴

8. **We would know even more about what works to prevent gun violence if the NRA hadn’t blocked federal funding for gun violence prevention research since 1996.**

In 1996, alarmed by recent public health research that indicated that guns in the home were linked to higher rates of homicide and suicide, the NRA convinced lawmakers to eliminate funding for gun violence prevention research to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.²⁵ They did the same thing for National Institutes of Health funding in 2011. As a result, we know far less than we need to about what works to prevent the more than 30,000 gun deaths that occur every year.

9. Common sense gun safety regulations protect lawful ownership and use of guns.

The 1994 Assault Weapons Ban that expired in 2004 protected the rights of gun owners by exempting every shotgun and hunting rifle in use at the time.²⁶ Senator Dianne Feinstein's proposed 2013 legislation reinstating the ban specifically exempts over 900 sporting weapons.²⁷ Background checks do not prevent legal gun purchases.

10. The majority of Americans, including gun owners and NRA members, support common sense gun safety regulation.

Almost three-quarters of NRA members (74%)²⁸ and more than four out of five gun owners (85%)²⁹ believe that all potential gun buyers should be subject to a criminal background check. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (65%) and half of gun owners (50%) believe that allowing people to own assault weapons makes the country a more dangerous place.³⁰ Fifty-seven percent of Americans are in favor of a nationwide ban on assault weapons.³¹ A majority of Americans support banning high capacity ammunition clips (53%)³² and bullets designed to explode or penetrate bullet-proof vests (56%).

11. The NRA has actively prevented enforcement of current gun safety laws.

Since the 1970s, the NRA and its allies in Congress have worked to make it more difficult for the federal agencies responsible for overseeing firearms dealers to regulate criminal or negligent dealers.³³ By banning the disclosure of data on gun sales, known as trace data, to the public, banning electronic storage of firearms sales records, and prohibiting the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) from requiring dealers to inventory their stock of weapons, the NRA has made it incredibly difficult for the government to trace the source of crime guns and to identify dealers engaging in selling guns to criminals. By preventing law enforcement from using trace data in legal proceedings and limiting the resources and operating flexibility of the ATF, the NRA has successfully blocked the agency from holding criminal dealers and traffickers accountable.

12. The NRA represents a small minority of gun owners.

The NRA claims nearly 5 million members.³⁴ Based on surveys showing somewhere between 22³⁵ and 29³⁶ percent of American adults owning guns, there are an estimated 51.6 to 68 million gun owners in the country.³⁷ This means that conservatively, the NRA only represents between seven and nine percent of American gun owners. Beyond the numbers, the NRA is clearly out of sync with both gun owners and NRA members on current policy issues. For example, polling data show that 85 percent of gun owners³⁸ and 74 percent of NRA members support universal background checks,³⁹ a policy position that the NRA vehemently opposes.

13. Armed school guards and teachers will not necessarily make children safer but may jeopardize the futures of some children.

Armed guards or officers are already in about one-third of our nation's public schools.⁴⁰ Columbine High School had an armed guard,⁴¹ and Virginia Tech had a full campus police force. There is no evidence that armed guards or police officers in schools make children safer.^{40,42} Educators are strongly opposed to arming teachers. A National Education Association poll of its membership found that only 22 percent were in favor of arming teachers, while 68 percent were opposed and 61 percent were strongly opposed.⁴³ While there isn't clear evidence that armed security guards or police officers keep children in schools safer, there is very troubling evidence that their large presence on school grounds leads to the criminalization of some children, especially Black and Latino males, at increasingly younger ages and the feeding of children into the prison pipeline.⁴⁴ Alternatives to armed guards include threat

assessment teams, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and Restorative Justice Practices, which have all shown to be effective in reducing violence, improving school safety, and maintaining a positive school climate that allows teachers to teach and students to learn.^{45,46,47}

14. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is forbidden from regulating the sale and manufacture of guns. A 1976 amendment to the Consumer Product Safety Act specifically states that the Commission “shall make no ruling or order that restricts the manufacture or sale of guns, guns ammunition, or components of guns ammunition, including black powder or gun powder for guns.”⁴⁸ As a result, the CPSC can regulate teddy bears and toy guns⁴⁹ but not real guns, despite the fact that they are one of the most lethal consumer products.

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