

PROFILE OF GUN VIOLENCE IN COLORADO

According to the CDC's most recent data, almost 40,000 lives were taken in 2019 by gun violence in our country.¹ From shopping centers, movie theaters, parks, houses of worship, medical clinics, beauty shops, offices, college campuses, a night club, music festival, high schools, factory, and even an elementary school, there isn't a community space that hasn't been desecrated by gun violence.

Colorado's Firearm Deaths

Trends: 2014-2020

TABLE 1: COLORADO FIREARM DEATHS BY INTENT, 2014-2020

YEAR	TOTAL FIREARM DEATHS	HOMICIDES BY FIREARM	SUICIDES BY FIREARM	LEGAL INTERVENTION	UNINTENTIONAL DEATHS BY FIREARM	FIREARM DEATHS, UNDETERMINED INTENT
2014	663	107	535	9	*	10
2015	704	140	543	12	3	6
2016	793	159	598	18	11	7
2017	792	162	599	20	5	6
2018	891	190	661	26	7	7
2019	856	167	653	22	9	5
2020	925	240	651	24	6	4

* Indicates fewer than 3 events.

Source: Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. From Colorado Violent Death Reporting System, which is based on death certificates, law-enforcement reports, and coroner/medical examiner reports. Occurrences in Colorado among both Colorado residents and non-residents.

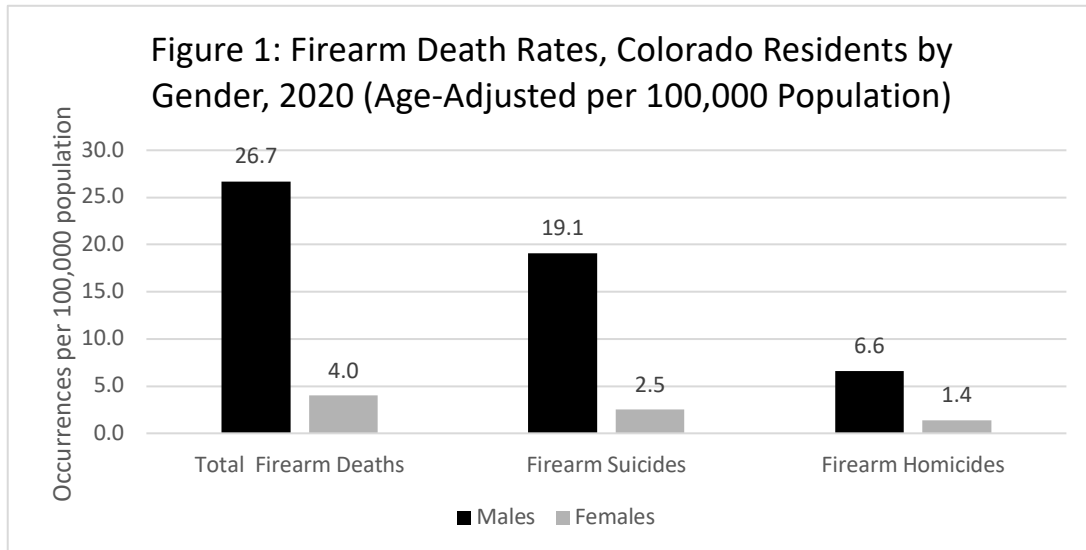
TABLE 2: COLORADO FIREARM DEATH RATES: TOTAL, HOMICIDES, AND SUICIDES (AGE-ADJUSTED PER 100,000 POPULATION), 2014-2020

YEAR	TOTAL FIREARM DEATHS	HOMICIDES BY FIREARM	SUICIDES BY FIREARM
2014	11.9	1.9	9.6
2015	12.5	2.5	9.7
2016	14.1	2.9	10.6
2017	13.3	2.8	10.1
2018	15.1	3.3	11.1
2019	14.2	2.9	10.7
2020	15.3	4.1	10.6

Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Based on death certificates alone. Occurrences among Colorado residents whether the event occurred inside or outside Colorado.

- In 2020, a total of 925 people died by firearms, the highest number on record in Colorado. The ratio was 15.3 per 100,000 population (age-adjusted).
- Between 2014 and 2020, the number of firearm deaths increased by 40%, while the population increased by 9%.
- By far the largest number of firearm deaths in Colorado were suicides, 651 in 2020, accounting for 70% of all firearm deaths. The rate showed a 10% increase between 2014 and 2020.
 - Firearms were used in half of all suicide deaths in both Colorado and the nation and were the single most common method.
 - Colorado, like all Rocky Mountain states, has among the highest suicide rates in the U.S., 5th highest in 2019.
- 2020 also saw 240 homicides by firearms, and both the number and rate more than doubled between 2014 and 2020.
 - Both the number and rate increased by more than 40% between 2019 and 2020.
 - Seventy percent of all homicides were with firearms in 2020.
- Firearm deaths by legal intervention (law enforcement) more than doubled. According to a recent report by CPR News, Colorado has the nation's 5th highest rate of fatal law-enforcement shootings.²

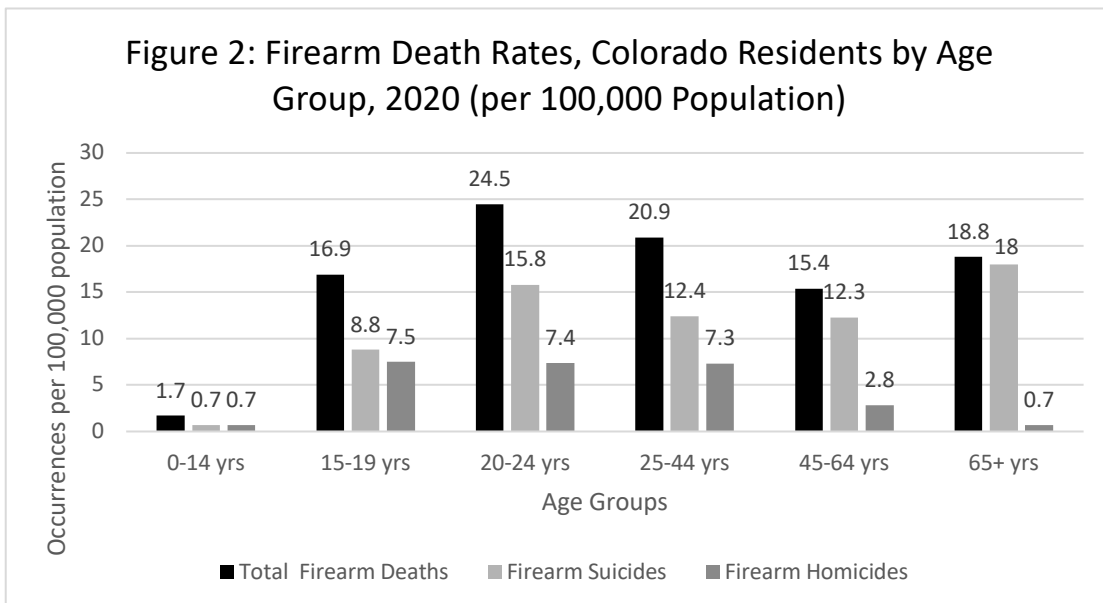
Differences in Firearm Deaths by Gender



Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Based on death certificates alone. Occurrences among Colorado residents whether the event occurred inside or outside Colorado.

- Males were nearly seven times more likely to die by firearms than were females, accounting for 87% of all firearm deaths.
- Males were nearly eight times more likely to die by firearm suicides than were females and nearly five times more likely by firearm homicides.

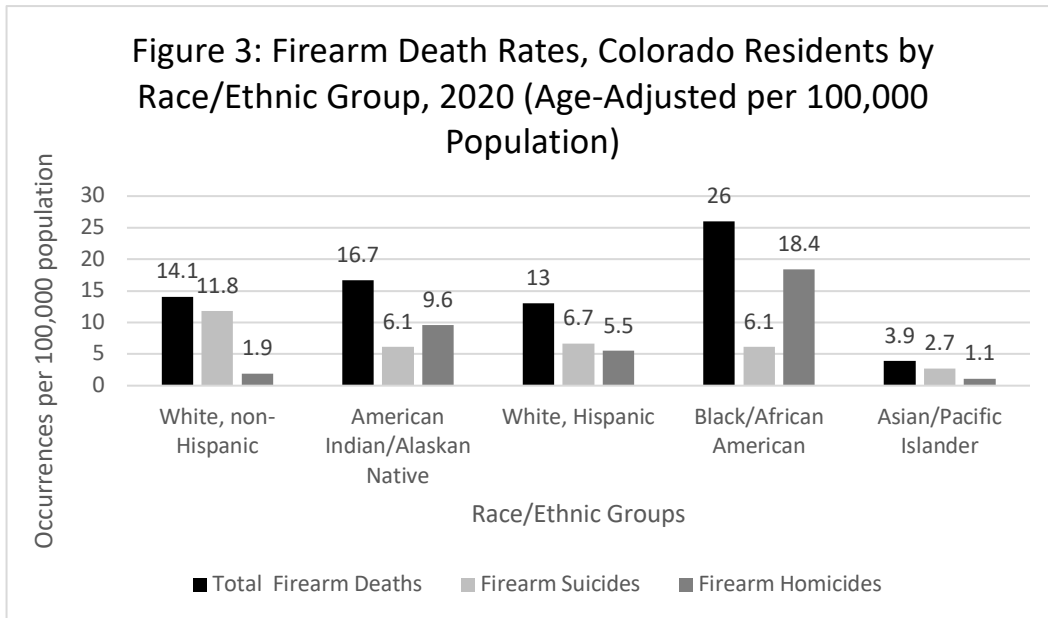
Differences in Firearm Deaths Among Age Groups



Source: Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Based on death certificates alone. Occurrences among Colorado residents whether the event occurred inside or outside Colorado.

- 20-24-year-olds had the highest firearm death rate of any age group, because that age group had relatively high rates of both suicide and homicide.
- The population aged 65+ was the most likely to die from firearm suicide, which accounted for nearly all of the firearm deaths in that age group.

Differences in Firearm Deaths by Race/Ethnic Group



Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Based on death certificates alone. Occurrences among Colorado residents whether the event occurred inside or outside Colorado.

- The highest firearm death rate was among Blacks/African Americans. That was due to the high firearm homicide rate, which accounted for over 70% of all firearm deaths in that group.
- White non-Hispanics had the highest firearm suicide death rate, accounting for nearly all firearm deaths in that group.

Overrepresentation of Firearm Deaths in Specific Gender-Age-Race/Ethnic Groups

- Black males aged 15-44 accounted for 1.4% of Colorado's population and 24% of firearm homicides in 2020, more than 17 times the representation of this group in the state's population.
- White non-Hispanic males aged 65 and over accounted for 6% of Colorado's total population and 21% of firearm suicides in 2020, 3.5 times their representation in the population.

(Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Based on death certificates alone. Occurrences among Colorado residents whether the event occurred inside or outside Colorado.)

Colorado's Firearm Injuries

Trends: 2016-2020

TABLE 3: COLORADO FIREARM INJURIES AND TOTAL INJURIES, 2016-2020**

YEAR	FIREARM INJURIES	TOTAL INJURIES
2016	735	473,667
2017	800	477,326
2018	925	472,673
2019	939	457,635
2020	1,283	398,198

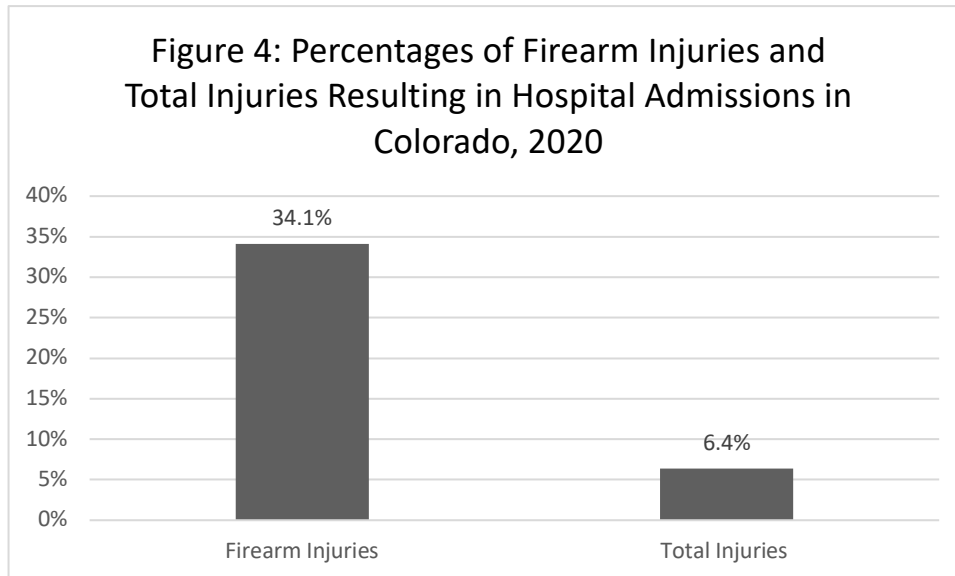
* Starting in 2016, hospitalization data were coded using the new ICD-10-CM coding structure. Therefore, counts and rates are not comparable to previous years.

** The numbers represent emergency-department (ED) visits and hospital admissions in which the individuals were treated and released. Those who were initially seen in an ED and then admitted to the hospital are counted only once, as hospital admissions, meaning that the two sets of numbers - ED visits and hospital admissions - are mutually exclusive.

Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Injury Epidemiology Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Based on data provided by the Colorado Hospital Association from discharge billings for ED visits and hospital admissions at Colorado hospitals. Includes only Colorado residents.

- Between 2016 and 2020, firearm injuries that resulted in emergency department (ED) visits or hospitalizations increased by 75%. The largest year-over-year increase occurred between 2019 and 2020.
- In contrast, total injuries that resulted in ED visits or hospitalizations decreased during that time-period.
- According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 70% of medically treated firearm injuries are for firearm assaults, and 20% are unintentional firearm injuries.³

Hospitalizations for Firearm Injuries and Total Injuries



Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Injury Epidemiology Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

- One-third of firearm injuries resulted in hospital admission rather than treatment and release from a hospital ED, compared to 6.4% of all injuries. Hospital admission typically indicates more serious injury and results in far higher cost than ED treatment and release.
- According to a U.S. Government Accountability Office study using data from 2016 and 2017, inpatient hospital stays for firearm injuries cost an average of nearly \$31,000 per patient – 2.5 times the average cost of \$12,000 per patient admitted for a different reason. For patients with firearm injuries who came to the ED but weren't admitted, the average cost was nearly \$1,500 per patient – 2.7 times the average cost of \$540 treated and released from an ED for a different reason.⁴

Background Checks for Firearm Purchases in Colorado

One of the major impacts of the COVID pandemic was the dramatic increase in firearm sales in Colorado and across the country, although the pandemic was not the only reason for this surge. Nationwide, background checks related exclusively to gun purchases reached 21 million in 2020, the highest number on record and a 60% increase over 2019.⁵

TABLE 4: BACKGROUND CHECKS IN COLORADO, 2014-2020

YEAR	TOTAL # BACKGROUND CHECKS	# DENIED BACKGROUND CHECKS	% DENIED BACKGROUND CHECKS
2014	314,976	6,068	1.93%
2015	350,553	7,714	2.20%
2016	389,491	8,704	2.23%
2017	367,695	7,227	1.97%
2018	347,095	6,279	1.81%
2019	342,439	7,069	2.06%
2020	501,324	14,227	2.84%

Source: CBI InstaCheck Unit Statistics, Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

- In 2020, the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted 501,324 background checks for gun sales, the most ever reported by the state and a 46% increase over 2019. It is important to note that the number of background

checks performed by CBI is an undercount of the number of guns purchased, as there can be multiple guns purchased under one background check.

- Almost 3% of background checks were denied in 2020 – 14,227; 487,097 were approved.

Special thanks to Colorado Ceasefire for its role in originating this research and for its ongoing support of the project and to the staff of the Vital Statistics Program and the Injury Epidemiology Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for providing both data and their invaluable expertise for this report.

Notes

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2019 on CDC WONDER Online Database.

² <https://www.cpr.org/2020/02/04/dig-into-6-years-of-records-that-detail-colorados-police-shootings/>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/firearms/fastfact.html>. The Profile report does not include specific types of firearm injuries (e.g., assaults, unintentional injuries). This information will be added when available from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

⁴ United States Government Accountability Office, [Report to Congressional Requesters: Firearm Injuries - Health Care Service Needs and Costs](https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/715061.pdf), June 2021. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/715061.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.businessinsider.com/gun-sales-boom-2020-background-checks-hit-record-highs-2021-1>.

