

Firearm Injury Prevention

Whether you have an infant or a teenager, keeping a gun at home poses a very real danger to your family. As a parent, you are already familiar with safety measures such as seat belts, bicycle helmets, and locking up medicines and poisons. Take easy measures now to also reduce the risk of gun injury at home.

Did You Know?:

- **40 percent** of homes with children have one or more guns, and in **40 percent** of these homes the guns are *stored unsafely: unlocked, loaded, or both*.
- Firearm injuries in the U.S. are the **third** leading cause of death among children aged 10- to 14-years and the **second** leading cause of death for ages 15- to 24-years.
- Nearly **8 children and teens** in the U.S. are killed by firearms **every day**, and over 37 additional children and teens are seriously injured.
- Nearly all childhood unintentional shooting deaths occur in or around the home. **Fifty percent** occur in the home, and **40 percent** occur in the home of a friend
- A gun in the home is **22 times** more likely to be used in an unintentional shooting, a criminal assault or homicide, or an attempted or completed suicide than to be used to injure or kill in self-defense
- Depressed preteens and teens **commit suicide with guns more often than with any other method**.

An overwhelming number of parents believe that their children can tell the difference between real and toy guns, and that their children would not play with a real gun they found. However, studies have consistently shown that not only will **most children play with a gun that they find**, many will even pull the trigger. Children as young as 3 years can be strong enough to pull a trigger.

Just talking to your child about the dangers of firearms is therefore not enough. **A child's natural curiosity about a gun will overwhelm any safety lesson learned about the danger of a gun**. Hiding guns is simply not enough. If a gun is accessible in a home, there is a good chance a child will find it and play with it. There are countless tragic stories of kids finding guns parents thought were well-hidden.

What Can You Do?:

- **The safest thing is not to have a gun in a home where there are children**, especially not a handgun.
- If you keep a gun, **empty it out and lock it up!** A gun safe with a combination lock is safest. Lock and store ammunition in a separate location. If key locks are used, make certain children cannot access the keys.
- Always consider the question: **Are there guns where my children play?** Ask the parent of your child's friend if they have a gun before sending your child to play. If you have any doubts about the safety of someone's home, invite the children to your house instead.
- Even if you don't own a gun, educate your children that **guns are dangerous and that children should never touch guns**. Talk with them about the risk of gun injury outside the home in places where they may visit and play. Educate them to steer clear of guns when they are in the homes of their friends.
- Educate children that gun violence on television and in the movies is not real. Explain that **in real life children and grown-ups are hurt and killed with guns**. Because children learn gradually and often forget and test the rules, periodically repeat the message to stay away from guns.

- Talk to your pre-teens and teens about ways to solve arguments and end fights without guns and violence. Keep in mind that teenagers don't always follow the rules. Also remember that pre-teens and teens are attracted to guns as symbols of power. Most importantly, ***do not keep a gun in the home with a teenager*** – since you cannot always count on teens to stay away from guns, you have to keep guns away from them.
- Finally, remember that nonpowder guns (such as BB guns, pellet guns, air rifles, and paintball guns) also pose a serious risk of injury, permanent disability and even death to children. The range of muzzle velocities for nonpowder guns overlaps velocities reached by traditional firearms. ***Supervision, and the use of eye-protective devices, can significantly reduce the risk of injury from nonpowder guns.***

Firearm injury prevention is one of the most important responsibilities of gun owners and of those who care for children. Please contact your local police department or your child's physician if more information about firearm injury prevention is needed. Thank you for considering this very important subject.

Dr. Todd