COVID, FIREARMS, & SUICIDE

Emmy Betz, MD, MPH
University of Colorado School of Medicine
Eastern Colorado Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC)

@EmmyBetz
September 2020
2.5 MILLION GUNS SOLD IN MARCH, 2020 (85% INCREASE)

About 2 Million Guns Were Sold in the U.S. as Virus Fears Spread

By Keith Collins and David Yaffe-Bellany  April 1, 2020
Shootings Have Spiked in Philadelphia This Spring

Levels of gun violence and other violent crime in Philadelphia.

100% change from 2015-'19 average

Despite Lockdown, Gun Violence Has Increased in Chicago

Levels of gun violence and other violent crime in Chicago.

40% change from 2015-'19 average

Percentages indicate 2020 weekly incident totals compared to the average of the corresponding week in 2015 through 2019. Violent crime includes all incidents classified as homicide, aggravated assault, rape, or robbery.


Percentages indicate 2020 weekly incident totals compared to the average of the corresponding week in 2015 through 2019. Gun violence totals include non-firearm homicides. Violent crime includes incidents classified as aggravated assault, rape, or robbery.

Source: Chicago Police Department. Graphic: Daniel Nass / The Trace.
Three million more guns the spring 2020 spike in firearm sales

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data from the NICS database on background checks conducted.
Note: Data are adjusted for normal fluctuations by day of week.

Suicide Mortality and Coronavirus Disease 2019—A Perfect Storm?

- Stress, financial stressors, substance abuse
- Firearm access increases risk
- Mitigating factors:
  - More open discussion of mental health
  - Purpose/resiliency

Top E.R. Doctor Who Treated Virus Patients Dies by Suicide

“She tried to do her job, and it killed her,” said the father of Dr. Lorna M. Breen, who worked at a Manhattan hospital hit hard by the coronavirus outbreak.

COVID-19 has upended daily routines and brought anxiety, fear and uncertainty. In Colorado and across the nation, it also brought a surge in firearm purchases — often, anecdotally, by first-time gun owners. We should know: Some of our coalition members are proud owners of Denver area gun shops and understand that some first-time gun owners may be less experienced with firearm ownership best practices.

To new gun owners, we ask: “What now?” Owning a firearm brings responsibilities, including training in safe handling and ensuring that firearms are stored where untrained hands have no access.
We are a group of gun shop owners, firearm trainers, and public health researchers who came together with a shared goal of educating firearm retailers, range employees, and the general public about suicide prevention and firearm safety.
FIREARM INJURY PREVENTION INITIATIVE