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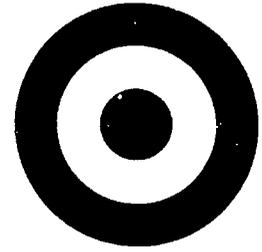
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ABSTRACT

Whether or not a suicide attempt results in death depends in large part on the method chosen. If a teenager attempts suicide with a gun, his or her death is nearly guaranteed. This brief fact sheet presents data on firearms and suicide, the third leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults in the United States. Any number of societal or personal factors could be causing more American youths to attempt suicide, but the use of guns makes these attempts successful. Statistics are given for the lethality of different suicide methods, and a comparison of the youth firearm suicide rate in an American city and a Canadian city with strict gun control laws. Finally, the impact of drinking on suicides among teenagers with access to firearms is touched on. (RB)

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# Firearm Facts



## YOUTH SUICIDE AND GUNS

If a teenager attempts suicide with a gun, his or her death is nearly guaranteed. Many thousands of American teenagers consider killing themselves each year. Whether or not a suicide attempt results in death depends in large part on the method chosen. The great majority of suicide attempts with guns succeed.

**Suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults in the United States, after car crashes and homicides.<sup>1</sup> In 1990, 3,165 youth ages 15–24 killed themselves with guns.<sup>2</sup>**

According to one nationwide survey, one of every 11 girls ages 12–14 and one of every 25 boys ages 12–14 experience significant suicidal thoughts.<sup>3</sup>

**From 1953 to 1978, the rate of suicide among young people tripled; this rise was due entirely to an increase in the firearm-caused suicide rate.<sup>4</sup>**

Any number of societal or personal factors could be causing more youths to attempt suicide, but the use of guns makes these attempts successful.

Restricting the availability of firearms could reduce the youth suicide rate.<sup>5</sup>

**Guns are now used in approximately 60% of all teenage suicides.<sup>2</sup>**

**Very few teenagers who use a gun to attempt suicide survive and get help; most are taken directly to the morgue.**

Although there is no national data on the lethality of different suicide methods, one county-based study found that 91% of suicide attempts with guns were successful. In comparison, 23% of suicide attempts with poisons were successful, and only 4% of suicide attempts with knives were successful.<sup>6</sup> Teenagers who attempt suicide would be more likely to survive if they did not use guns, even if the total number of suicide attempts stayed the same.

**People who have guns in their home are at a much greater risk of suicide than people who do not keep guns in their home.<sup>7,8</sup>**

People who do not have guns at home may be equally likely to attempt suicide as people who have guns. However, several studies document that members of gun-owning families are far more likely to attempt suicide with guns, and are therefore more likely to die.<sup>7</sup> Reducing the availability of firearms, the most deadly and most common method of teenage suicide, should reduce the number of teenage suicide deaths.

**The youth firearm suicide rate in an American city with minimal restrictions on gun ownership is over 3 times higher than in a Canadian city with strict gun control laws.<sup>5</sup>**

The handgun suicide rate is 10 times higher among 15–24 year olds in the American city.<sup>5</sup>

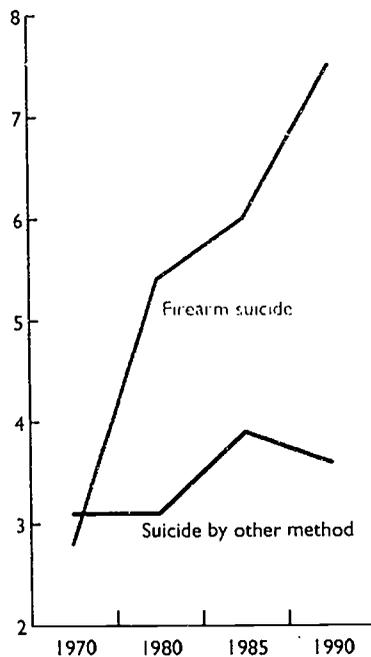
**In one study, teenagers who used firearms to commit suicide were five times more likely to have been drinking than the teenagers who killed themselves using other methods.<sup>9</sup>**

Drinking encourages the impulsive nature of teenagers and teenage suicide.

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Suicide among 15–19 year olds, by method, 1970–1990 (Fingerhut, unpublished data, NCHS)

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