A veteran, struggling with PTSD, who feels isolated but doesn’t know how to say so. A woman unable to escape an abusive relationship. A police officer called to intervene in a violent situation.

Victims of gun violence come from all backgrounds and walks of life. The patterns of injuries vary, but virtually all parts of our community are affected by this public health problem, including people of all genders, races and ethnicities. Whether it’s the victims themselves, or the communities they live in, trauma associated with firearm injury is all too common.

**What do we mean when we say "gun violence"?**

Violence is behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. Gun-related violence is violence committed with the use of a firearm, including violence that results in injuries or death. This includes homicide, suicide and attempted suicide, and accidental or unintentional injury or death.

In Denver, and in the country as a whole, there are more gun deaths due to suicides than homicides. Between 2011 and 2015, there were 186 firearm-related suicides among Denver residents compared to 115 firearm-related homicides. Firearm violence often makes the news, but firearm suicides rarely do.

Thus, the public may have a distorted impression about who is being affected by firearm injuries in their community, as well as the circumstances related to those injuries. Denver Public Health recently released a new report, [*The Epidemiology of Firearm Injuries in Denver, Colorado*](#) which provides a complete picture of firearm injuries in Denver.

**Lethality of Guns**

Firearm injuries are much more likely to result in death, compared to other injuries. In Denver, of 575 trauma cases in which a paramedic found the patient dead at the scene, 40% were injured by firearm even though firearm injuries accounted for less than 1% of all trauma-related paramedic responses.
Addressing Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue

Gun violence is not unique to Denver. It is an epidemic that plagues many cities around the nation. Traditionally, violence prevention efforts have focused on individuals, asserting that violence is a moral issue or a result of human failing.

In recent years, a new approach has emerged that looks at violence as a health issue and treats it like a disease epidemic. According to the Violence as a Health Issue Collaborative, "violence causes more violence, expressing itself as outbreaks of retaliations and clusters of suicide".

Addressing violence as a health issue allows the health community to apply data-driven methods and proven public health strategies to stop the disease from spreading while simultaneously changing norms, environments, and behaviors to prevent future violence.

There are a few examples of this approach taking place right here in Denver. The Denver Health Violence Prevention Committee is promoting safe firearm storage among patients and increasing provider knowledge around firearm safety. Also, Denver Public Health is leading an effort to coordinate cross-sector youth violence prevention efforts and create a strategic plan for reducing youth violence in Denver.

What Are We Doing?

- Denver Health partners with GRASP to administer a hospital based violence intervention program called AIM (At-Risk Intervention and Mentoring).
- Denver Public Health and Denver Health are promoting safe storage practices and responsible firearm ownership.
- Denver Environmental Health provides up-to-date data on deaths in Denver County.
- Denver Public Health is collaborating with partners across the city to create a youth violence prevention strategic plan.

What Can You Do?

- Get involved in the national Movement Towards Violence as a Health Issue.
- If you own a firearm, store it properly. Learn more by visiting the LOK-IT-UP website.
- If you’re worried about someone, call, text, or chat online with the clinicians at Rocky Mountain Crisis Partners 24/7 at 1-844-493-8255.
- Get involved in local efforts applying a public health approach to violence prevention.

About Denver Vital Signs

Published by Denver Public Health and Denver Environmental Health, Denver Vital Signs is a quarterly publication on important public health topics for policymakers, public health professionals and interested citizens of Denver County.