

Increase in firearm related morbidity and mortality in New Mexico:

Recommendations for preventing firearm injury, homicide and suicide

Summary

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more Americans died of gun-related injuries in 2021, the most recent year for which complete data are available, than in any other year on record¹. In 2021, NM had the third highest gun-related mortality rate in the nation² and the fourth highest suicide rate in the nation³. According to data from the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH), in 2020, 64% of violent deaths in NM were suicides involving guns⁴. Between July 2022 to June 2023, NM experienced a noticeable surge in firearm-related hospital-based emergency department visits among children aged 0-17, particularly of youth aged 14-17⁵.

Gun violence has become a public health crisis in the United States and in New Mexico (NM). On September 7, 2023, NM Governor Lujan Grisham declared gun violence a public health emergency⁶. On September 21, 2023, the White House created the first-ever Office of Gun Violence Prevention⁷, followed by NMDOH issuing, on September 28, 2023, a report titled “Comprehensive Report on Gunshot Victims Presenting at Hospitals in New Mexico”⁸.

Background

The root causes of gun-related violence are deeply intertwined with poverty, racism, educational opportunity, and other social determinants of health. Preventing violence requires a comprehensive public health approach involving multiple coordinated interventions with proven effectiveness, such as promoting firearm safety and teaching non-violent interpersonal communication skills.

The New Mexico Department of Health’s [Office of Injury and Violence Prevention](#) (OIVP) works to improve the health and well-being of all in New Mexico through the prevention of injuries and violence, including gun violence.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7140a4.htm>

² https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm_mortality/firearm.htm

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/suicide-mortality/suicide.htm>

⁴ <https://www.nmhealth.org/publication/view/report/8463/>

⁵ <https://www.nmhealth.org/publication/view/report/8463/>

⁶ <https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2023/09/07/governor-declares-gun-violence-a-public-health-emergency-after-murder-of-11-year-old-boy-on-his-way-home-from-baseball-game/>

⁷ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/21/president-joe-biden-to-establish-first-ever-white-house-office-of-gun-violence-prevention-to-be-overseen-by-vice-president-kamala-harris/>

⁸ <https://www.nmhealth.org/publication/view/report/8463/>

In 2021, the OIVP released the [Statewide Strategic Plan for Preventing Firearm Injuries and Deaths in New Mexico, 2021-2026](#).

In 2022, the OIVP was tasked with the administration of the Violence Intervention Fund ([HB 68](#)).

On October 6, 2023, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham renewed executive orders on gun violence and substance misuse as the New Mexico Department of Health issued a [revised public health order](#). The new public health order includes an additional provision, that the NM Department of Public Safety organize safe surrender events (also known as “gun buy-backs”) in the cities of Albuquerque, Española, and Las Cruces within thirty days.

This year, to raise awareness and promote safe firearm storage, the OIVP funded a gun violence awareness campaign, which included the development of the website www.safestoragenm.org, where New Mexicans can learn about safe firearm storage and request a free gun lock.

Recommendations for Healthcare Professionals for Preventing Firearm Injury, Homicide and Suicide

- 1) Educate patients about firearm safety.
- 2) Provide gun locks and other safety devices.

Clinicians who counsel families to store guns safely can positively influence gun storage behaviors, especially when gun locks and other safety devices are provided.

Educational Opportunity: Violence Prevention and Gun Safety ECHO

The ECHO Institute at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center is launching a Violence Prevention & Gun Safety ECHO. This ECHO will create a community of practice to share knowledge, discuss best practices and improve self-efficacy regarding violence prevention. The curriculum will cover topics including domestic violence, interpersonal violence, suicide, loneliness, social determinants of health, environmental justice, and firearm safety. This program will provide important communication skills, calls for action, and CME/CEU credit for participation.

The Violence Prevention & Gun safety ECHO is an 8-week, one-hour per week, tele-mentoring program for all health professionals, first responders, public health professionals, legal personnel, and educators. This ECHO will be held every Tuesday from 12noon to 1:00pm beginning October 24th through December 12th, 2024.

To register for this free CME/CEU opportunity, go to:

<https://iecho.org/public/program/PRGM169403777489726XA6LZX0H>

If you have questions, please email Joanna Katzman, MD, MSPH, at:

violencepreventionandgunsafetyECHO@salud.unm.edu