

Youth Firearm Access & Safety

What is the impact on youth access to firearms?

Firearm violence contributes to many youth fatalities in MO.

Missouri is among the top states for youth firearm fatality rates (**Figure 1**; [KFF 2020](#)). Between 2018–2021, firearms and suffocation were the top causes of injury-related death among youth under 18 (9.9% and 9.7% of all youth deaths respectively; [CDC WONDER](#)).

- Most youth firearms deaths were homicides (58%), followed by suicides (32%), accidents (7%) or unknown causes ([CDC WONDER](#)).
- Youth firearm deaths in Missouri are more common in inner cities (19.5 per 100,000 youth) than the rest of the state (4.4–7.3 per 100,000; [CDC WONDER](#)).

Access. In CO and IA, more rural youth reported easy access to firearms than those in urban areas, with the majority of rural youth reporting access to an unsecured firearm in their homes ([Spark 2021](#); [Jennissen 2021](#)).

- In addition to unsecured firearms in the home, youth may access firearms by firearms bought for them, friends, theft, or illegal purchases.
- There are no recent studies on how these methods vary based on geography or other demographic features.



Research Highlights

It is not clear if minors can legally open carry firearms in permit-less concealed carry states like Missouri.

In Missouri, firearms were the leading cause of injury-related deaths among youth under 18 from 2018–2021.

Child access prevention laws reduce juvenile firearm suicides, homicides and firearm assaults.

The laws regarding minors and firearms are unclear in MO.

Under [federal law](#), one must be at least 18 years old to buy a long gun and 21 years old to buy a handgun from a licensed dealer. Dealers are federally licensed and follow federal statutes.

- Parents may buy a handgun for juvenile use in ranching, hunting, etc. The youth must have written permission from their parent to possess the handgun ([ATF](#)).

MO [law](#) states that “federal laws deemed infringements of United State and Missouri Constitutions... [such as] any act forbidding the possession, ownership, use, or transfer of a firearm, firearm accessory, or ammunition by law-abiding citizens...” will not be enforced.

- The U.S. Department of Justice is currently suing Missouri on the grounds that this approach “is invalid under the Supremacy Clause, is preempted by federal law, and violates the doctrine of intergovernmental immunity” ([DOJ 2022](#)).

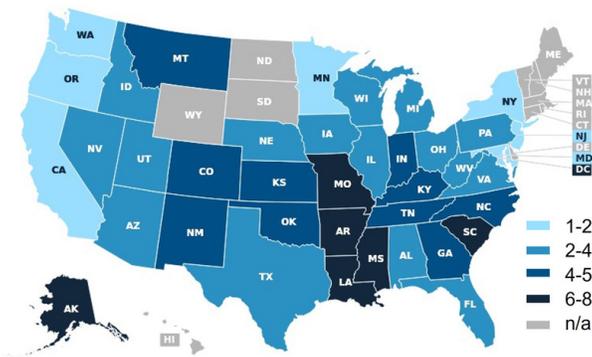


Figure 1. Firearm death rate (per 100,000) in youth. Adapted from [KFF 2020](#).

Age of Possession. MO law allows firearms to be sold or given to a minor with parent consent, excluding people who cannot legally possess a firearm— fugitives from justice and those who are convicted of a felony, regularly intoxicated by drugs or alcohol, or judged to be mentally incompetent ([RSMo 571.070](#)).

- MO law states that the legislature “...strongly promotes responsible gun ownership, including parental supervision of minors in the proper use, storage and ownership of all firearms...” There are no statutory penalties included in this section.

Open/Concealed Carry. MO does not require a permit to carry a concealed firearm. However, open carry requires a valid concealed carry permit ([RSMo 571.037](#)).

- In MO, a person must be at least 19 years old to apply for a concealed carry permit. There are no stated penalties for open carry without a concealed carry permit ([RSMo 571.101](#); [RSMo 571.037](#)).

In MO, youth (6-15) can hunt. At age 11, youth can get certified in hunter education and hunt certain animals alone. If not certified, they must hunt with an adult who is ([MO MDC](#)).

- The type of firearm allowed depends on what animal is being hunted. MO youth need licenses to hunt deer and turkey ([MO MDC](#)).

Firearm policies impact youth safety.

Child Access Prevention. Limits to youth firearm access such as secure firearm storage and minimum age requirements can reduce gun violence among young people ([RAND](#)).

- Between 1981 and 2017, laws that restricted juvenile firearm access and raised the age of purchase to 21 reduced youth suicide (13% and 6% respectively; [Kappelman 2021](#); [Kivisto 2020](#)).
- Child-access prevention laws decrease homicides and firearm assault injuries among young people ([RAND 2023](#)).
- In a national study, states that held the firearm owner responsible for negligent storage had a 15% decrease in firearm homicides ([Azad 2020](#)).

Other Firearm Policies. There is some evidence that policies such as dealer background checks, purchaser waiting periods, firearm surrender, and prohibitions of firearm possession for select offenders lower homicide rates ([RAND](#)).

- Firearm homicides increased by 23% after Missouri’s permit-to-purchase law was repealed in 2007 ([Webster 2014](#)).

Shall-issue laws, where a permit must be given if the applicant meets the standards set in law, and ‘stand-your-ground’ laws increase firearm homicides ([RAND 2023](#)).

- One national study found a 7% higher firearm homicide rate in shall-issue compared to may-issue states ([Knopov 2019](#)).
- Firearm homicides in FL increased by 31.6% after a “stand-your-ground-law” was enacted in 2005 ([Humphreys 2017](#)).

Read our Science Note on [Secure Firearm Storage](#) for more information on how firearm storage impacts firearm deaths.

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