

L.A. Health



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at a glance

Firearm Storage and Risk to Children

The Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS) is a population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to health services among adults and children in the county. This factsheet presents data from the most recent survey (1999–2000) of 8,354 adults and 6,016 children in Los Angeles County and was conducted for the Department of Health Services between September 1999 and April 2000 by Field Research Corporation.

Each day in the United States, an average of 16 children and youth under the age of 20 years are killed and many more are injured by guns.¹ In 1999, 12.3% of deaths nationally and 18.6% of deaths in Los Angeles County among children and youth less than 20 years of age were due to firearms.^{2,3} The availability and accessibility of firearms in and around the home increases the chances of a child being killed or injured. As a result, if firearms are present in the home, they should be kept unloaded and placed in locations that are not accessible to children.^{1,4} To maximize safety, firearms should be unloaded and locked in a cabinet, lockbox, or other firearm container, and stored separately from locked ammunition.^{1,5} In 1998, 19% of the United States population lived in homes with loaded and unlocked firearms.⁶

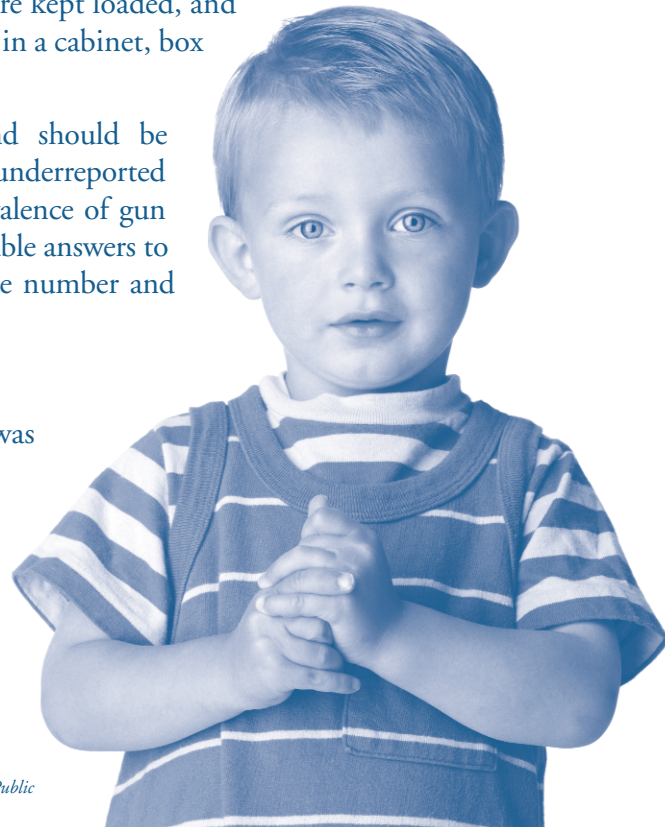
The following data on the prevalence and storage of guns in Los Angeles County is based on self-reported information from the 1999–2000 Los Angeles County Health Survey. A series of firearm questions were asked including whether a firearm (including pistols, shotguns and rifles; and excluding BB guns, starter pistols, or guns that cannot fire ammunition) is kept in or around the home (including the garage, outdoor storage area, car, truck, or other motor vehicle), how often these firearms are kept loaded, and how often these firearms are locked in a cabinet, box or other firearm container.

The following data should be considered minimal estimates and should be interpreted with caution. Firearm ownership is likely to have been underreported given the results of a national survey that found a much higher prevalence of gun ownership.⁷ In addition, respondents may have provided socially desirable answers to questions about storage practices resulting in an underestimate of the number and percentage of children at risk.

Firearm Ownership

→ Overall, the self-reported prevalence of possessing a firearm was 15% countywide.

1. National Center for Health Statistics, 1996. *Keep Your Family Safe From Firearm Injury*. American Academy of Pediatrics. www.aap.org/advocacy/d1family.htm.
2. National Vital Statistics Report. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System. Vol 48, No. 11, July 24, 2000, p. 10, 67. www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/48/nvsr48-11.pdf.
3. Death Statistical Master File, 1999. Center for Health Statistics, California Department of Health Services.
4. National Rifle Association. *NRA Gun Safety Rules, A Parent's Guide to Gun Safety*. www.nrahq.org/safety/education/guide.asp.
5. Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute (SAMMI). *Safety Curriculum: Project HomeSafe*. www.projecthomesafe.org/safety.htm.
6. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.
7. Schuster MA, Franke TM, Bastian AM, Sor S, Halfon N. *Firearm Storage Patterns in US Homes with Children*. *Am J Public Health* 2000; 90:588-594



- The prevalence of having a firearm in or around the home was 16% among households without children and 13% among households with children under the age of 18 years.
- In contrast, a national study reported a 35% prevalence of firearms in houses with children,⁷ suggesting a substantial degree of underreporting in the present survey.

Firearm Storage

- 58% of respondents with firearms in or around the house reported unsafe storage practices (Figure 1).
- Unsafely stored firearms were reported among 65% of respondents without children, 45% of respondents with children under age 18, and 48% among respondents with children less than six years of age.
- Very unsafe storage practices (firearms kept loaded and unlocked) were reported by 18% of all respondents, 21% of respondents without children, 11% of respondents with children less than 18, and 14% of respondents with children under six years of age.
- Based on these percentages, a minimum of 114,000 children reside in households with unsafely stored firearms—23,000 in homes with very unsafe storage practices and 91,000 (43,000 + 48,000) in homes with unsafe storage practices (Figure 2).
- African-Americans reported the highest prevalence of overall unsafe firearm storage (67%), including 26% who reported very unsafe storage; 62% of Whites reported unsafe firearm storage, including 19% who reported very unsafe storage (Figure 3).

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Figure 1. Prevalence of Unsafe and Very Unsafe Firearm Storage Practices in Households with and without Children, Los Angeles County 1999

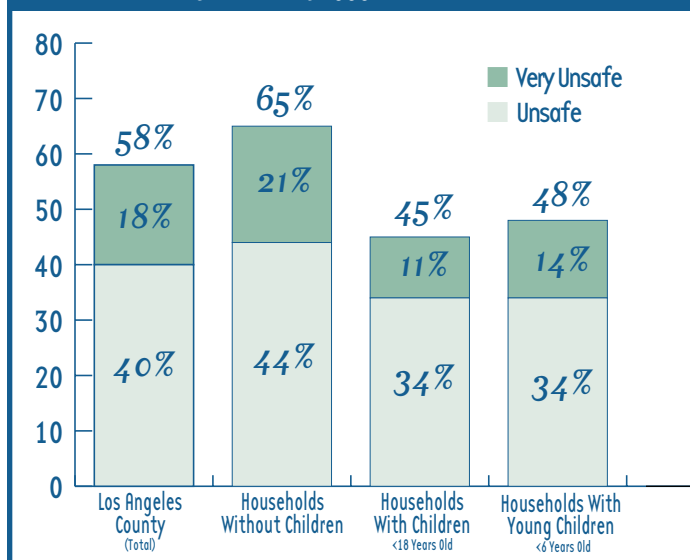


Figure 2. Firearm Storage Practices and Number of Children (<18 Years) Exposed, Los Angeles County 1999*

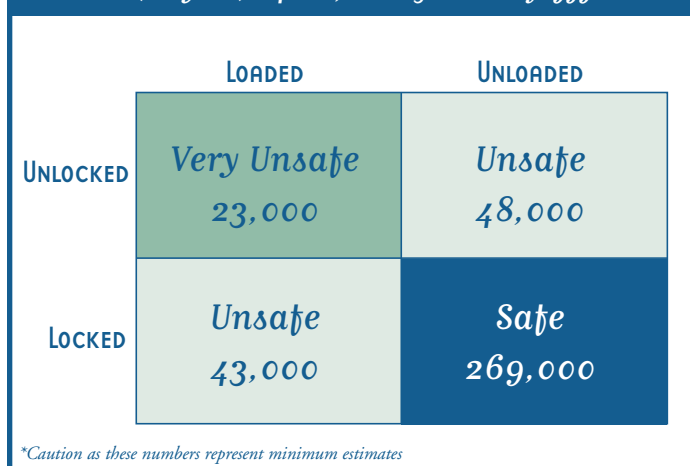


Figure 3. Prevalence of Unsafe and Very Unsafe Firearm Storage Practices by Race, Los Angeles County 1999

