

Texas Preventable Disease

NEWS



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FIREARM-RELATED MORTALITY IN TEXAS

Firearm-related deaths have been, and still are, a major public health problem throughout the US and especially in Texas. From 1979-1987, 294,070 Americans died from firearm-related injuries; 29,106 of these were Texans.¹

In the US during this nine-year period, the age-adjusted firearm-related death rates ranged from a low of 4.5 to a high of 26.3 per 100,000 population. The US average was 13.6 per 100,000. Texas had the fifth highest rate (20.6 per 100,000), a rate 51% higher than the national average. According to the CDC study, 93% of all firearm-related deaths involved intentional use of the weapon.

More than 3,000 Texans die from firearm-related injuries annually. Until 1990, only motor vehicles accounted for more injury deaths (see related article in this issue).² In a recent Texas study, Lee and colleagues identified 30,906 firearm-related deaths during the ten-year period from 1976-1985.³ The economic cost of these deaths was estimated to be \$40.7 billion per year.

TDH STUDY⁴

In order to understand the current magnitude of firearm-related deaths in Texas, TDH epidemiologists examined firearm-related mortality among Texans for the years 1985 through 1990. Deaths of Texas residents, in whom the underlying cause of death was a firearm-related injury (ICD9 E-Codes: E922.0-922.9, E955.0-955.4, E965.0-965.4, E970, or E985.0-985.4) were reviewed using death certificate data from the TDH Bureau of Vital Statistics. Population estimates were obtained from the TDH Bureau of State Health Data and Policy Analysis.

Highlights of the TDH Study

- * 19,184 Texans died of firearm-related injuries from 1985 through 1990.
- * Of these, 408 were children under the age of 15 years.
- * Texans aged 25-34 years had the highest death rate from firearm injuries (Figure 1).
- * More than 527,000 years of productive life were lost due to these premature deaths.
- * The highest crude death rate was 20.0 per 100,000 population in 1986. The average annual death rate was 18.7 per 100,000 population (Figure 2).
- * 48% of firearm deaths were suicides; 45% were assaults (Figure 3).
- * The elderly (65+ years) had the highest suicide firearm death rate (18.4) per 100,000 population.
- * Texas males were 5 times more likely to be killed by firearms than Texas females.
- * Blacks were 1.9 times more likely to be killed by firearms than whites or Hispanics (Figure 4).
- * Black males had the highest firearm death rate (57.1 per 100,000 population) (Figure 4).

How best to prevent firearm-related fatalities is a very emotional and controversial issue. However, as with any major public health problem, risk factors, interventions, and preventive strategies must be vigorously evaluated.

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The National Committee for Injury Prevention and Control, composed of 31 individuals with expertise in local, state, and national injury issues, has made several recommendations to reduce firearm injuries:⁵

1. States should consider firearm licensing alternatives such as restrictive licensing or permissive licensing with a waiting period and background checks.
2. Both municipalities and states should consider prohibiting the carrying of firearms except by law enforcement and security personnel in areas where people are at high risk for firearm injuries.
3. Priority should be given to strictly enforcing current laws at the federal, state, and local levels.

4. Local, state, and federal initiatives to restrict the manufacture, sale, possession, and carrying of handguns should be supported and evaluated for their impact on firearm injuries.

Prepared by: TDH Injury Control Program. For more information, contact the Injury Control Program at (512) 458-7266.

References:

1. CDC. Injury mortality atlas of the United States, 1979-1987.
2. Bureau of Vital Statistics, TDH, Austin, Texas.
3. Lee RK, Burau K, Clanton S. Firearm mortality in Texas, 1976-1985: how far is Fort Smith? *Tex Med* 1991;87(4):78-83.
4. Zane D, Preece MJ, Patterson PJ, Svenkerud EK. Firearm-related mortality in Texas (1985-1990). *Tx Med* 1991;87(11).
5. National Committee for Injury Prevention and Control (US). Injury prevention: meeting the challenge. *Am J Prev Med* 1989;5(3):261-7 (suppl).

**FIREARM-RELATED MORTALITY
TEXAS, 1985-1990
(N=19,184)**

Figure 1.
Death rate per 100,000 population
by age group

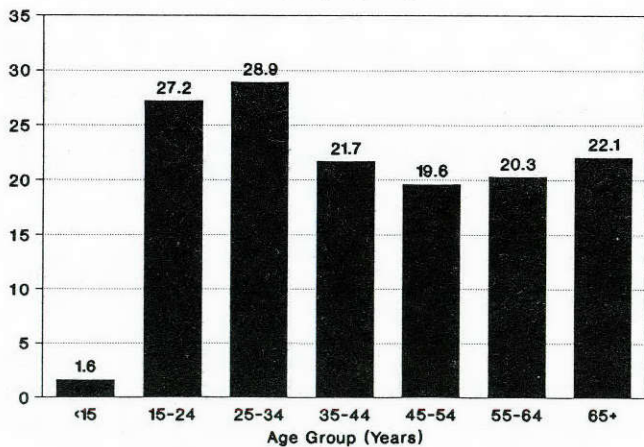


Figure 2.
Death rate per 100,000 population
by year

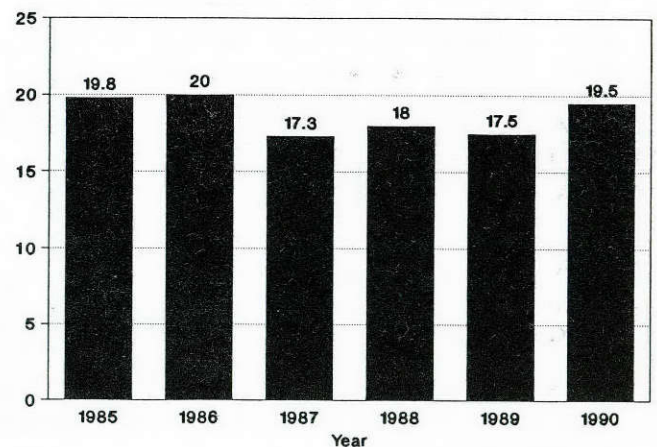


Figure 3.
Percent of deaths
by type of death

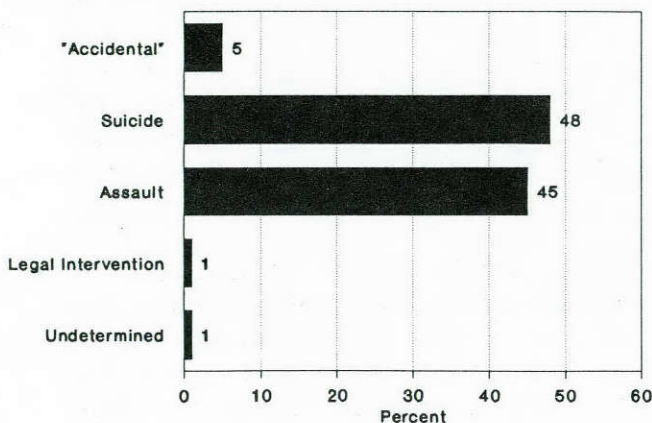
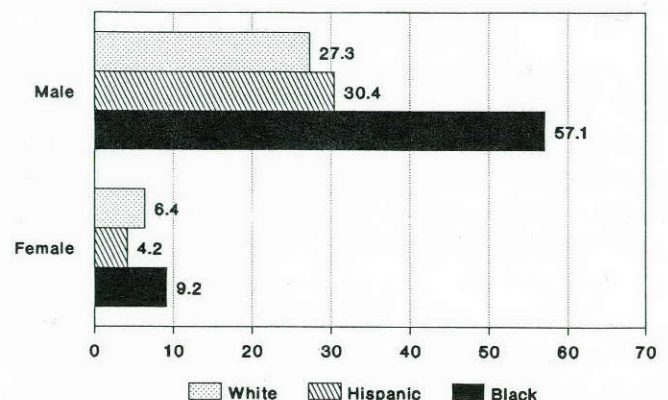


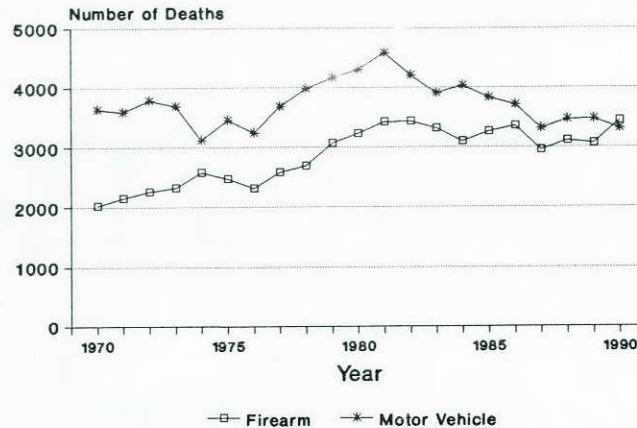
Figure 4.
Death rate per 100,000 population
by race and sex



FIREARMS SURPASS MOTOR VEHICLES AS LEADING INJURY KILLER IN TEXAS

In 1990, firearms surpassed motor vehicles as the leading cause of injury mortality in Texas (Figure 5). That year, there were 3,443 deaths related to firearms and 3,309 motor vehicle-related deaths (TDH Bureau of Vital Statistics). Motor vehicles have been the leading injury killer in the state since vital records were computerized in 1964. 1990 was the first time in the past 27 years that firearms surpassed motor vehicles in injury mortality. For more information, contact the TDH Injury Control Program at (512) 458-7266.

Figure 5.
Motor vehicle and
firearm-related deaths,
Texas residents, 1970-1990



**OFFICIAL MEMORANDUM
STATE OF TEXAS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

Between 1985 and 1990, nineteen thousand one hundred and eighty-four Texans were killed by firearms. Of these, 408 were children under the age of 15. In addition, it is estimated that over 300 children in Texas sustain nonfatal firearm injuries each year.

Studies have found that most unintentional firearm deaths among children occur in homes with improperly stored firearms, and they frequently involve other children playing with guns in the absence of adult supervision.

All Texans should practice firearm safety in the home by following these suggestions of the American Academy of Pediatrics: never keep a loaded gun in the house; keep guns and ammunition locked in separate places; always treat a gun as if it were loaded and ready to fire; never allow children access to guns; and ensure that these precautions have been carried out wherever children might visit.

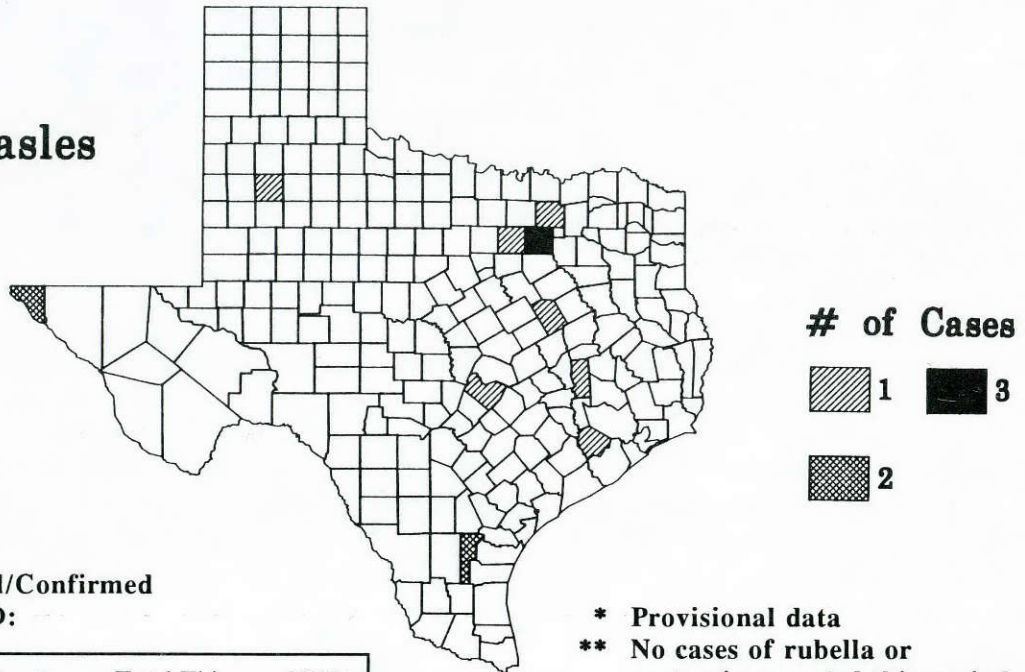
To bring public attention to these facts, the Texas Department of Health, San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, Texas Pediatric Society, Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Police Chief's Association, and the Texas Safety Association are sponsoring Firearm Safety in the Home Month in November.

Therefore, I, Ann W. Richards, Governor of Texas, do hereby proclaim the month of November 1991, as: **FIREARM SAFETY IN THE HOME MONTH** in Texas and urge the appropriate recognition thereof.

VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASE UPDATE *

Suspected/Confirmed Cases Reported
With Onsets From October 6-19, 1991
Weeks 41-42

Measles



Summary of Suspected/Confirmed Cases Reported YTD:

	Latest Onset Date	Total This Period	YTD Total
MEASLES	10/18/91	14	584
RUBELLA**	09/19/91	—	97
PERTUSSIS**	10/01/91	—	218

* Provisional data
** No cases of rubella or pertussis reported this period

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