

Gun deaths in US remain highest among high-income nations

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Gun deaths are a serious public health issue in the United States and the scope of the problem is often difficult to illustrate. A new study published in *The American Journal of Medicine* lays out the risk in concrete terms. When compared to 22 other high-income nations, Americans are ten times more likely to be killed by a gun than their counterparts in the developed world. Specifically, gun homicide rates are 25 times higher in the U.S. and, while the overall suicide rate is on par with other high-income nations, the U.S. gun suicide rate is eight times higher.

In order to help put America's relationship with guns into perspective, researchers from the University of Nevada-Reno and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health analyzed mortality data gathered by the World Health Organization in 2010. Investigators found that despite having similar rates of nonlethal crimes as other [high-income countries](#), the U.S. has much higher rates of lethal violence, mostly driven by extremely higher rates of gun-related homicides.

The study reveals some stark truths about living and dying in the United States. When compared to other high-income nations, as an American you are:

- Seven times more likely to be violently killed
- Twenty-five times more likely to be violently killed with a gun
- Six times more likely to be accidentally killed with a gun
- Eight times more likely to commit [suicide](#) using a gun

- Ten times more likely to die from a firearm death overall

Homicide is the second leading cause of death for Americans 15 to 24 years of age, and the third leading cause of death among those 25 to 34 years of age. Investigators found that for these two groups, the risk relative to their counterparts in other developed nations is alarmingly elevated. Americans 15 to 24 years of age are 49 times more likely to die from firearm homicide compared to similarly aged young people in other high-income nations. For those aged 25 to 34, the risk is 32 times higher.

"More than two-thirds of the homicides in the U.S. are firearm homicides and studies have suggested that the nongun homicide rate in the U.S. may be high because the gun homicide rate is high," explained Erin Grinshteyn, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Nevada-Reno, School of Community Health Science. "For example, offenders take into account the threat posed by their adversaries. Individuals are more likely to have lethal intent if they anticipate that their adversaries will be armed."

Suicide is another source of gun deaths. While suicide rates for the U.S. are similar to those in other high-income countries, Americans are eight times as likely to take their own lives using a gun. Dozens of studies in the U.S. indicate that less access to guns would decrease both the U.S. [gun](#) suicide rate and our overall suicide rate.

"Differences in overall suicide rates across cities, states, and regions in the United States are best explained not by differences in mental health, suicide ideation, or even suicide attempts, but by availability of firearms," explained study co-author David Hemenway, PhD, Professor, Health Policy at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center and the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center. "Many suicides are impulsive, and

the urge to die fades away. Firearms are a swift and lethal method of suicide with a high case-fatality rate."

America's love affair with firearms has dire consequences, especially when compared to outcomes in the rest of the developed world. Investigators found that despite having only half the population of the other 22 high-income nations combined, the U.S. accounted for 82% of all firearm deaths. In addition, the U.S. accounted for 90% of all women, 91% of children aged 0 to 14 years, and 92% of youth aged 15 to 24 years who were killed by firearms.

"Overall, our results show that the U.S., which has the most firearms per capita in the world, suffers disproportionately from firearms compared with other high-income countries," noted Dr. Grinshteyn. "These results are consistent with the hypothesis that our firearms are killing us rather than protecting us."

More information: Erin Grinshteyn et al. Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-income OECD Countries, 2010, *The American Journal of Medicine* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.10.025](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.10.025)

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