



Voices of Child Health in Chicago REPORT

Volume 3 Number 6
July 2021

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Twenty-two percent of Chicago parents reported having a firearm in the home.

Although the majority of parents who owned guns said their guns were locked away (89%), nearly half said their firearm was stored loaded (46%).

Twenty-three percent of parents said their family had been personally affected by gun violence.

Firearm Safety, Gun Violence and Chicago Families

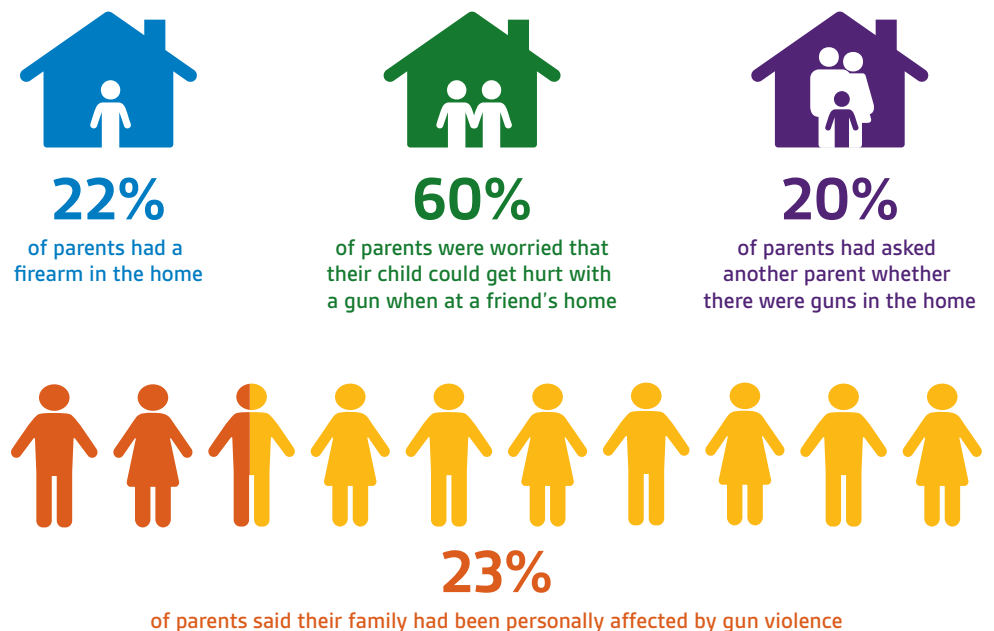
Chicago has seen continuing firearm violence, with over 2,000 shooting victims so far in 2021.^{1,2} The epidemic of firearm violence impacts children across the state, as it remains the number one cause of death in children and youth across Illinois.³ In some of our previous reports, Chicago parents identified gun violence as their top social concern for kids in the city,^{4,5} and in recent years, they reported it was the main social problem getting worse the fastest for Chicago youth.⁶

In this month's *Voices of Child Health in Chicago Report*, we focus on the importance of firearm safety and parents' concerns about gun violence in the city. We asked 1,505 Chicago parents from all 77 community areas in the city about their experiences with firearm safety as well as other gun violence prevention- and concern-related questions.

Firearms in the home

When we asked Chicago parents about firearms, 22% confirmed that they keep a firearm in the home (Figure 1). We asked these parents their reasons for keeping firearms in the home. The majority (77%) responded that they kept firearms in the home for protection. Other reasons were for hunting or target shooting (32%), as part of a collection (14%) and for a job of a parent (11%) (parents could select more than one reason).

Figure 1. Summary of the proportion of Chicago parents for each firearm survey question



 Ann & Robert H. Lurie
Children's Hospital of Chicago™

Stanley Manne
Children's Research Institute™

Smith Child Health Outcomes,
Research and Evaluation Center

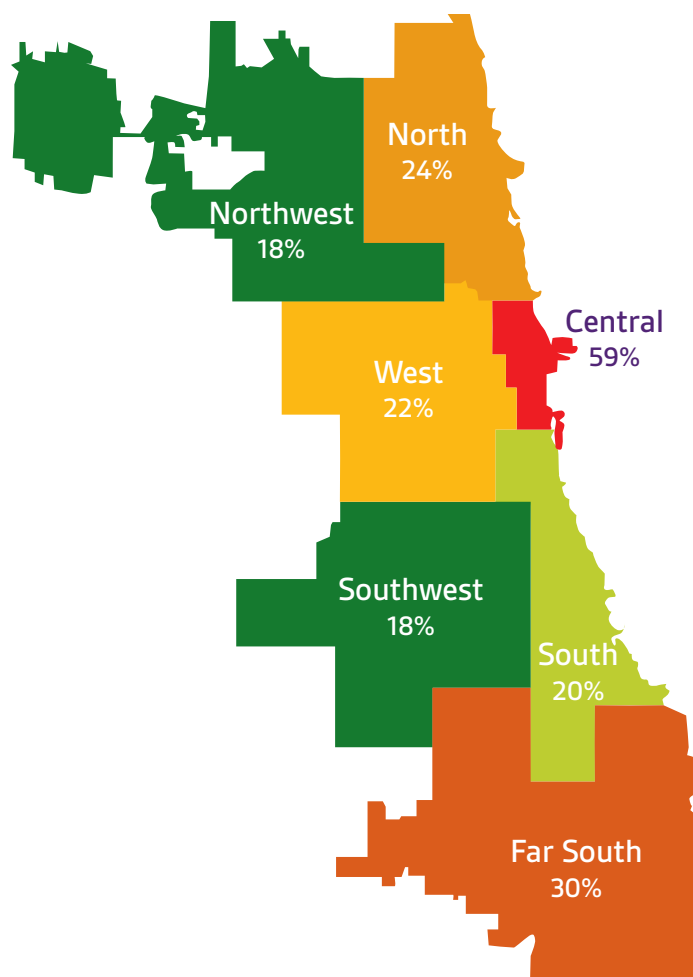
Parental gun ownership differed by city region. Parents in the Central region were more likely to own a gun than parents in all other city regions (59% vs. 18–30%) (see Figure 2). There were also differences in gun ownership by household income, parent race/ethnicity and parent gender. Parents who had a household income below the federal poverty level (FPL, which in 2021 was \$26,500 for a family of four⁷) were least likely to have guns in the home (9%), compared with parents with middle household income (20%) and those with the highest household income (34%). White parents were more likely to own a gun than parents of other race/ethnicity groups (32% vs. 15–21%). Additionally, dads were more likely to report having a gun in the home than moms (36% vs. 12%).

Several studies have demonstrated that the presence of a firearm in the home significantly increases the risk of unintentional firearm death and suicide in youth.⁸⁻¹⁰ The American Academy of Pediatrics maintains that a home without firearms is the safest way to prevent child firearm injuries or death in the home.¹¹

Safety precautions with household firearms

We also asked parents who owned firearms about any safety precautions they took. Among parents who had a firearm in the home, the vast majority (89%) said that their firearms were locked.

Figure 2. Proportion of Chicago parents who have a gun in the home by city region



However, 46% said that the firearms in their home were stored loaded, contrary to safe storage recommendations. Concerningly, in the Central city region where rates of gun ownership among parents were the highest, parents also were less likely to store their guns safely (i.e., locked and unloaded) than parents in other regions (16% vs. 48–74%). Moms who reported having a gun in the home were more likely to have the gun safely stored than dads (72% vs. 49%).

Firearm safety in other homes

We also asked parents about safety precautions they took to prevent firearm injury for their children in other people's homes. We found that parents were not likely to have asked another parent whether their home contains guns in the last 12 months. Only 20% of parents had asked another parent this question. Some parents noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, child interactions in playdates have been limited, potentially providing a reason for the low percentage of parents who had asked another parent about firearms in the home.

Even though most parents had not asked another parent whether there were guns in the home, the majority of parents in our sample were either very worried or somewhat worried (60%) that their child could get hurt with a gun when at a friend's home.

Parents' concerns about gun violence in Chicago

We asked parents about their concerns for their children related to gun violence. Parents identified multiple concerns, including the possibility that their child(ren) might be physically harmed by gun violence (56%), mental health effects that local gun violence might have on their child(ren) (42%), and the possibility that their child(ren) could gain access to a gun (27%) (Figure 3). Parents indicated concern about school shootings and stray bullets as additional worries regarding gun violence in Chicago. In general, parents' concerns about gun violence were consistent across parent race and ethnicity, age, gender and household income level.

How has gun violence impacted Chicago families' behaviors and activities?

Fear of firearm violence has a significant impact on Chicago families. Parents reported changing their behavior in the following ways to keep their families safe from gun violence: 56% of parents avoided being out at times that are less safe, 53% of parents had talked with their children about safety related to gun violence, 35% had taken steps to secure their homes, 34% had talked with their children about safety around police officers and 25% used local resources less often than they would have liked (Figure 4). Other parents noted that they had missed work or medical appointments to avoid local gun violence and that they had cautioned their children about playing with toy guns. In our sample, 23% of parents said their family had been personally affected by gun violence. Research has shown that youth who are exposed to gun violence in their communities are more likely to feel anxious or depressed than their peers, and to have reduced academic achievement that can be long-lasting.^{12,13}

Figure 3. Proportion of Chicago parents who reported being concerned about each firearm issue

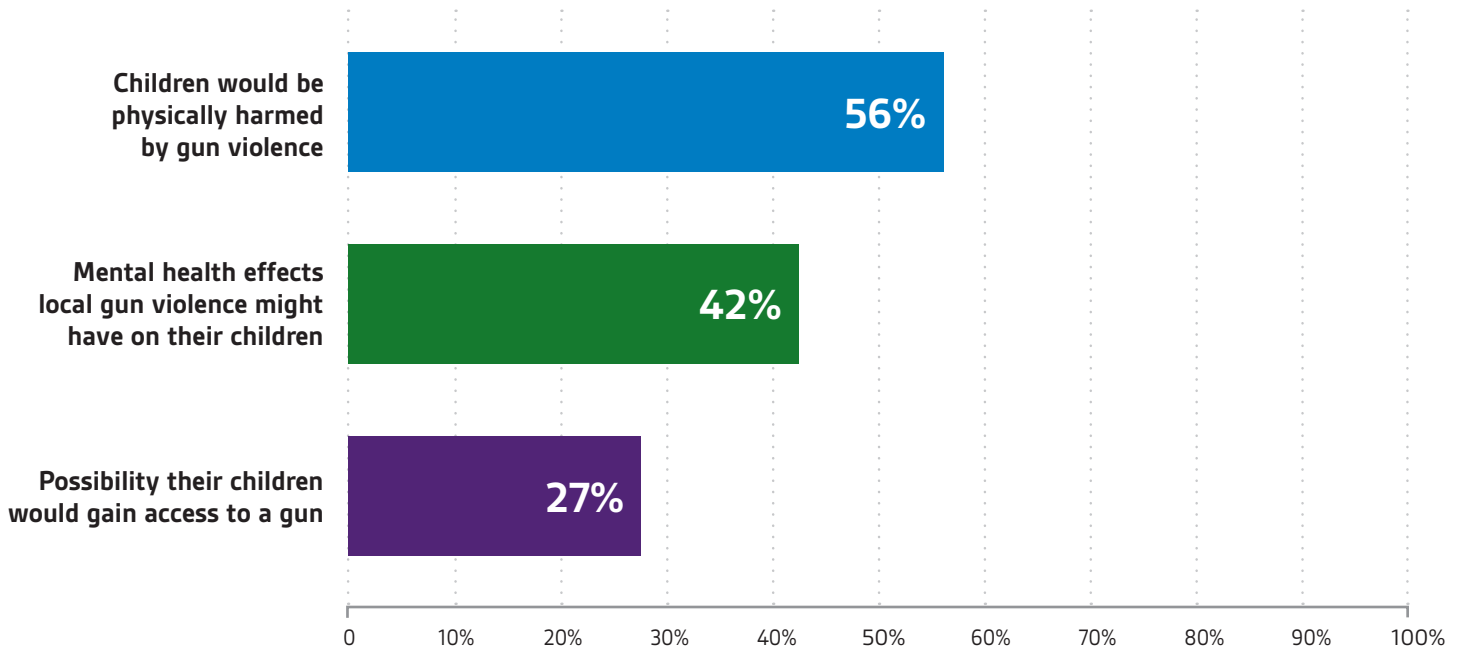
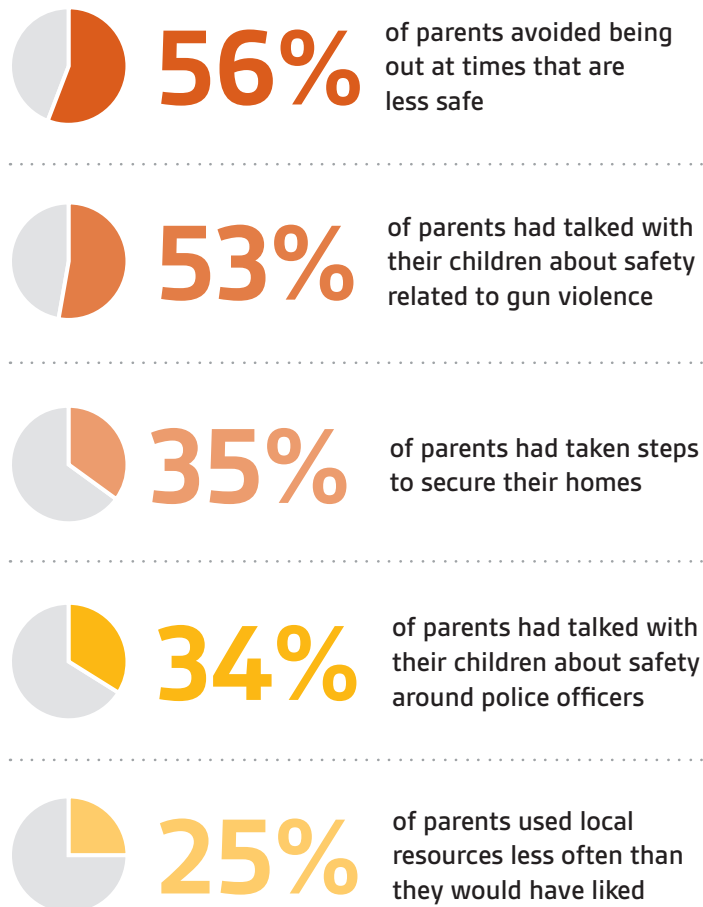


Figure 4. Proportion of Chicago parents who reported gun violence had affected them in each of the following ways



There were some differences by city region in the precautions parents took to keep their families safe from gun violence. For instance, parents in the Far South region were more likely to say that they used local resources less than they would have liked (37%) than parents in the North (17%) or Northwest (18%) regions. Talking to children about safety around police officers also varied by city region: parents in the South region were more than twice as likely to have talked with their children about safety around police officers (53%) compared with parents from the North region (21%). Black and Latinx parents also were more likely to have talked with their children about safety around police officers (37-49%) than white parents (23%).

Keep your children safe from firearm violence:

Lurie Children's supports and builds upon recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and other injury prevention organizations to keep your children safe from firearm violence:¹³

- Maintaining a home without guns is the most effective way to keep your child safe from unintentional firearm injury, suicide and homicide. Are you interested in safely removing guns in your home? You can contact your local law enforcement agency to see if they accept unwanted firearms. Other organizations such as the [National Center for Unwanted Firearms](#) will also accept unwanted firearms (833.GIV.GUNS).
- If there are firearms in the home, store firearms unloaded and locked¹⁴ in a lockbox or gun safe. Store and lock away ammunition separately. Storing firearms safely in the home may prevent up to 32% of youth firearm deaths.^{15,16} Keep your children safe when they visit another home by asking the other child's

parent or guardian, “Is there an unlocked gun in your house?”
Find tips for having this conversation from the [ASK Campaign](#).¹⁷

- Teach your children that if they ever encounter a gun, they should leave the room immediately without touching the gun, and tell a trusted adult.
- Join Lurie Children’s and [Strengthening Chicago’s Youth](#)¹⁸ in supporting firearm legislation that has been proven to decrease gun violence in states that have enacted similar laws.
- Become an active member of your community and support agencies that address violence prevention.
- Social connectedness is a [factor that can protect](#)¹⁹ youth from gun violence. You can foster social connectedness by helping your children build close social bonds with family, trusted adults, and peers, and by supporting local youth development [programs](#).
- Learn about safe storage of [firearms](#)²⁰ and [gunlocks](#).²¹
- For more information, check out: [Guns in the Home — HealthyChildren.org](#).¹¹

REFERENCES

1. Chicago Tribune: Tracking Chicago Shooting Victims. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/data/ct-shooting-victims-map-charts-htmlstory.html>
2. Schuba T, Struett D, Kenney M, Dudek M, Sherry S. “Our kids are becoming extinct”: Chicago children are being killed by guns at far faster rate than years past. *The Chicago Sun-Times*. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/crime/2021/6/8/22523157/chicago-gun-violence-children-kids-killed-shootings>. Published June 8, 2021.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS).
4. <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/voices-of-child-health-in-chicago/Top10SocialIssues/>
5. <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/voices-of-child-health-in-chicago/chicago-parents-identify-the-top-10-social-issues-affecting-youth-2018-19/>
6. <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/voices-of-child-health-in-chicago/problem-getting-worse-fastest-in-chicago/>
7. <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/>
8. Dahlberg LL, Ikeda RM, Kresnow M-j. Guns in the home and risk of a violent death in the home: Findings from a national study. *Am J Epidemiol*. 2004;160(10):929-936.
9. Miller M, Azrael D. Access to firearms increases child and adolescent suicide. *Society for Research in Child Development — Child Evidence Brief*. 2020;7. Available at: <https://www.srcd.org/research/access-firearms-increases-child-and-adolescent-suicide>
10. Council on injury, violence, and poison prevention executive committee. Firearm-related injuries affecting the pediatric population. *Pediatrics*. 2012;1350(5):e1416-1423. doi:10.1542/peds.2012-2481
11. Guns in the Home. American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention. Published 2021. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Handguns-in-the-Home.aspx>
12. Hurt H, Malmud E, Brodsky NL, Giannetta J. Exposure to Violence: Psychological and Academic Correlates in Child Witnesses. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2001;155(12):1351–1356. doi:10.1001/archpedi.155.12.1351
13. Burdick-Will J. Neighborhood Violent Crime and Academic Growth in Chicago: Lasting Effects of Early Exposure. *Soc Forces*. 2016;95(1):133-158. doi:10.1093/sf/sow041
14. <https://projectchildsafe.org/parents-and-gun-owners/>
15. Grossman DC, et al. Gun storage practices and risk of youth suicide and unintentional firearm injuries. *JAMA*. 2005;293(6):707-714.
16. Monuteaux MC, Azrael D, Miller M. Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage with Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death among US Youths. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2019;173(7):657-662. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1078
17. <https://www.bradyunited.org/program/end-family-fire/asking-saves-kids>
18. <https://scv-chicago.org/>
19. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>
20. <https://besmartforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/BeSmart-Secure-Storage-Fact-Sheet-012521A-1.pdf>
21. https://projectchildsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PCS_SafeStorage_19-1.pdf

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

This report is based on data from the Voices of Child Health in Chicago Parent Panel Survey. The survey is administered to a sample of Chicago parents by Lurie Children’s and NORC at the University of Chicago via internet and telephone. The survey is administered to the same panel of parents three times each year. The data in this report was collected from November 2020 through February 2021. The sample consisted of 1,505 Chicago parents, step-parents, or guardians who had at least one child under 18 years of age in the household (referred to as “parents” in this report). Parents were from all 77 community areas in Chicago. The survey completion rate was 56% and the cumulative survey response rate was 1.5%. All analyses were conducted with statistical weighting so that the results are representative of the parent population in the City of Chicago during the time period of data collection. For more information about the VOCHIC Parent Panel Survey, visit luriechildrens.org/ParentPanel and our page on Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/cjz82/>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Davis MM, Heffernan ME, Smith TL, Bendelow A, Bhatti PK, Menker C, Helmcamp L, Attridge M, Sheehan KM. Firearm safety in Chicago families, *Voices of Child Health in Chicago Report*. Vol 3, Number 6. July 2021. Available at luriechildrens.org/voices.

Stanley Manne Children’s Research Institute™

Smith Child Health Outcomes,
Research and Evaluation Center

Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP
Director

Marie E. Heffernan, PhD
Associate Director

Carly Menker, BS
Research Associate

Tracie L. Smith, MPH
Senior Epidemiologist

Megan Attridge, MD
Expert Contributor

Anne Bendelow, MPH
Epidemiologist

Leslie Helmcamp, MPAff
Expert Contributor

Punreet K. Bhatti, MD
Project Manager

Karen Sheehan, MD, MPH
Expert Contributor

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on
Voices of Child Health in Chicago, contact:

Mary Ann & J. Milburn Smith Child Health Outcomes,
Research and Evaluation Center
Stanley Manne Children’s Research Institute
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago
225 East Chicago Avenue, Box 157
Chicago, IL 60611-2991

voicesofchildhealth@luriechildrens.org

luriechildrens.org/voices

This project is supported in part by an anonymous foundation and the Founders’ Board of Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago.