

Connecticut handgun licensing law associated with 40 percent drop in gun homicides

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A 1995 Connecticut law requiring a permit or license - contingent on passing a background check - in order to purchase a handgun was associated with a 40 percent reduction in the state's firearm-related homicide rate, new research suggests.

Researchers from the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, part of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, compared Connecticut's homicide rates during the 10 years following the law's implementation to the rates that would have been expected had the law not been implemented. The large drop in homicides was found only in firearm-related killings, not in homicides by other means, as would be expected if the law drove the reduction.

The findings are published online June 11 in the *American Journal of Public Health*, and will be discussed at a press conference hosted by Faiths United Against Gun Violence at the National Cathedral in Washington on June 11 at 4 p.m.

The Connecticut law requires all prospective handgun purchasers to apply for a permit in person with the local police regardless of whether the seller of the handgun is a licensed dealer or private seller. It also raised the handgun purchasing age from 18 to 21 years and required prospective purchasers to complete at least eight hours of approved handgun safety training.

"Permit-to-purchase laws, which require prospective handgun purchasers

to first obtain a license from the police after passing a comprehensive background check, appear to reduce the availability of handguns to criminals and other people who are not legally permitted to buy guns," says study author Daniel Webster, ScD, MPH, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research. "Licensing handgun purchasers is a particularly effective way to achieve comprehensive background checks and keep people from buying guns for people who are not legally allowed to own them."

Earlier research from Webster found that Missouri's 2007 repeal of its handgun license law was associated with a 25 percent increase in its firearm [homicide rates](#). For the Connecticut study, Webster and his colleagues used comparison states with homicide trends that most closely matched those in Connecticut before the law went into effect in order to predict what would have happened to homicide trends in Connecticut had the handgun licensing law not been implemented.

"Taken together, these studies provide compelling evidence that permit to purchase licensing systems is one of the most effective policies we have to reduce [gun violence](#)," Webster says.

Ten states plus the District of Columbia have handgun purchaser licensing laws. While state laws vary, in general, handgun purchaser laws work by requiring [background checks](#) for all gun sales (including private, unlicensed sellers), and put the responsibility of conducting the background check on local [law enforcement](#), not the gun seller.

"Research suggests that requiring in-person applications at [law enforcement agencies](#) may make it harder for individuals with a history of violence and criminality to get guns," says study co-author Jon Vernick, JD, MPH, co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research. "Future research should compare the effectiveness of requiring prospective gun purchasers to go to federally licensed gun

dealers for a background check versus local law enforcement agencies."

Public opinion survey data from Webster and his colleagues recently published in *Preventive Medicine* show that the majority of Americans (72 percent) and gun owners (59 percent) support requiring people to obtain a license from a local law enforcement agency before buying a handgun to verify their identity and ensure they are not legally prohibited from having a gun.

More information: "Association Between Connecticut's Permit-to-Purchase Handgun Law and Homicides" *American Journal of Public Health*, 2015.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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