

# Rifles and shotguns used more often in youth and rural suicides

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The researchers say their findings, published Feb. 3 in *Injury Epidemiology*, suggest that adopting safety measures for rifles or shotguns may prevent suicides, particularly among young people and

rural-area residents.

"Our goal as clinicians at Johns Hopkins Medicine is to save lives, and it's concerning to see that it's not just handguns, but long guns that are used commonly in youth [suicide](#)," says Paul Nestadt, M.D., assistant professor of psychiatry and [behavioral sciences](#) at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "Many of the safety protections that we have in place around the country typically don't apply to long guns, and the data suggest that our strategy needs to be modified."

In many states, there is no minimum age for owning long guns, and federal background checks are only required if buying from a licensed gun dealer. Requirements for permits and safety courses for rifles vary from state to state.

The public has long thought that handguns are more responsible for human deaths, including suicides, than long guns such as rifles and shotguns, which have been believed to be more commonly used for hunting or protection from wild animals. But now, in an analysis of data from 16 years of gun suicides in Maryland, Johns Hopkins Medicine researchers found that long guns were used more often in suicides by kids and teens than by adults, and were more commonly used in suicide by people in rural counties.

The [data analysis](#) reviewed 3,931 gun suicides in Maryland from 2003 to 2018. About 45% of children and teens used long guns to die by suicide, compared to 20% of adults over age 65 who used long guns. The researchers found that 52% of rural firearm suicides were by long gun, compared to 17% in urban counties. Using rifles for suicide increased by 60% during [hunting season](#), when researchers say rifles may be out and more available.

"In the midst of a suicidal impulse, a person will use what they have.

Firearms are particularly lethal. If one is easily available, that will be the method of choice," says Nestadt. "Holidays and hunting season are times when many [young people](#) receive hunting rifles as gifts, and I would advise [family members](#) to also provide gun locks or gun storage cabinets with their present. Just adding an extra protective step could be enough of a barrier to protect their family member from making an impulsive decision."

**More information:** Paul S. Nestadt et al, Prevalence of long gun use in Maryland firearm suicides, *Injury Epidemiology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1186/s40621-019-0230-y](#)

Provided by Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

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