

Dear Sen. Deschambault, Rep. Warren and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety this is a op ed that I submitted but I think speaks clearly to the issue. I am in favor of LD 759.

True or False: The Safety of Children Who Have Access to a Loaded Firearm is Endangered

“The safety of children who have access to a loaded firearm is endangered” is the topic of debate for the Maine State Legislature. LD 759 asserts that “storing or leaving a loaded firearm on premises under a person’s control when the person knows or reasonably should know that a child is likely to gain access to that firearm, and the child in fact gains access to that loaded firearm and uses it, is considered endangering the welfare of a child and is a Class D crime.”

The Maine statutory definition of "child" is any person who is less than 18 years of age. A Class D crime is punishable by up to 364 days incarceration and a \$2,000 fine.

Some would suggest that this law is not necessary for a variety of reasons.

It’s all about education; if you teach children not to touch guns they won’t.

False: Some might believe gun safety courses for children are the solution to reducing firearm associated childhood death and injuries. Although, gun safety courses have the potential to reduce death and injury from firearms, a study regarding the efficacy of the NRA’s Eddie Eagle GunSafe Program revealed that children were able to verbalize gun safety messages but this did not translate into appropriate gun safety skills. Children are naturally explorers and curious and do not apply learned skills to real life situations involving guns.

It is not easy to fire a gun. Children do not have the strength or dexterity to fire a gun.

False: Current data reveals 61% of all childhood deaths are related to injuries. Firearm injuries are the second leading cause of death among children in the United States between 1 to 19 years of age. Children as young as 2 have the dexterity to operate a handgun.

If you really hide the gun carefully, the child is not going to find it.

False: Children have been found to gain access to insecurely stored firearms even though it was thought that they were well hidden.

Firearm legislation does not reduce gun violence, if children want to get guns they will.

False: Strict state firearm legislation and child access prevention laws have been associated with lower pediatric firearm mortality rates and pediatric suicide rates.

Older children and teenagers who are depressed are the ones at risk for suicide so we need better mental health services.

True and False: While it is true that we do need mental health care services for children and adolescents, however ***access*** to firearms increases the risk of death from a suicide attempt because firearms have a 90% mortality rate when compared to other methods of suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Maine youth between 10 to 24 years of age and firearms, as the method, account for 47% of these suicides. Although adolescent mental illness is certainly a risk factor for

suicide, it has been reported that many adolescents without mental illness commit suicide impulsively as a result of relationship or other life crisis. Availability of a firearm in this time of crisis is a crucial factor in determining whether a suicide attempt will be fatal.

So, what did you decide?

Mary Tedesco-Schneck is a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner and an Assistant Professor of Nursing at the University of Maine and a board member of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Her views reflect the views of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics but do not reflect those of her employer.

References

Cunningham, R.M., Walton, M.A., & Carter, P.M. (2018). The major causes of death in children and adolescents in the United States. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 379, 2468-2475.

Doh, K.F., Morris, C.R., Akbar, T., Chaudhary, S., Lazarus, S., Figueroa, J., Agarwal, M., & Simon, H. (2021). The relationship between parents' reported storage of firearms and their children's perceived access to firearms: A safety disconnect. *Clinical Pediatrics*, 60(1), 42-49.

Himle, M.B., Miltenberger, R.G., Gatheridge, B.J., & Flessner, C.S. (2004). An evaluation of two procedures for training skills to prevent gun play in children. *Pediatrics*, 113, 70–77.

Madhavan, S., Taylor, J., Chandler, J.M., Staudenmayer, K.L., & Chao, S.D. (2019). Firearm legislation stringency and firearm-related fatalities among children in the US. *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*, 229(2), 150-156.

Maine Centers for Disease Control. (2018). *Suicide in Maine: 2018 update: A data brief: Youth (ages 10-24)*.

Santaella-Tenorio, J., Cerdá, M., Villaveces, A., & Galea, S. (2016). What do we know about the association between firearm legislation and firearm-related injuries? *Epidemiologic Reviews*, 38, 140–157.