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## How to stop toddler-involved shootings

BY: [CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM](#) - OCTOBER 18, 2023 11:54 AM



□ A billboard in St. Paul promotes safe gun storage. Photo by Max Nesterak/Minnesota Reformer.

On Sunday morning, a 4-year-old in Martin County grabbed a loaded gun in the backseat of the car he was in and inadvertently shot the two-year-old sitting next to him, [according to the Martin County Sheriff's Office](#).

It's at least the fifth time this year that a Minnesota child has accidentally shot someone, according to [data maintained by Everytown for Gun Safety](#).

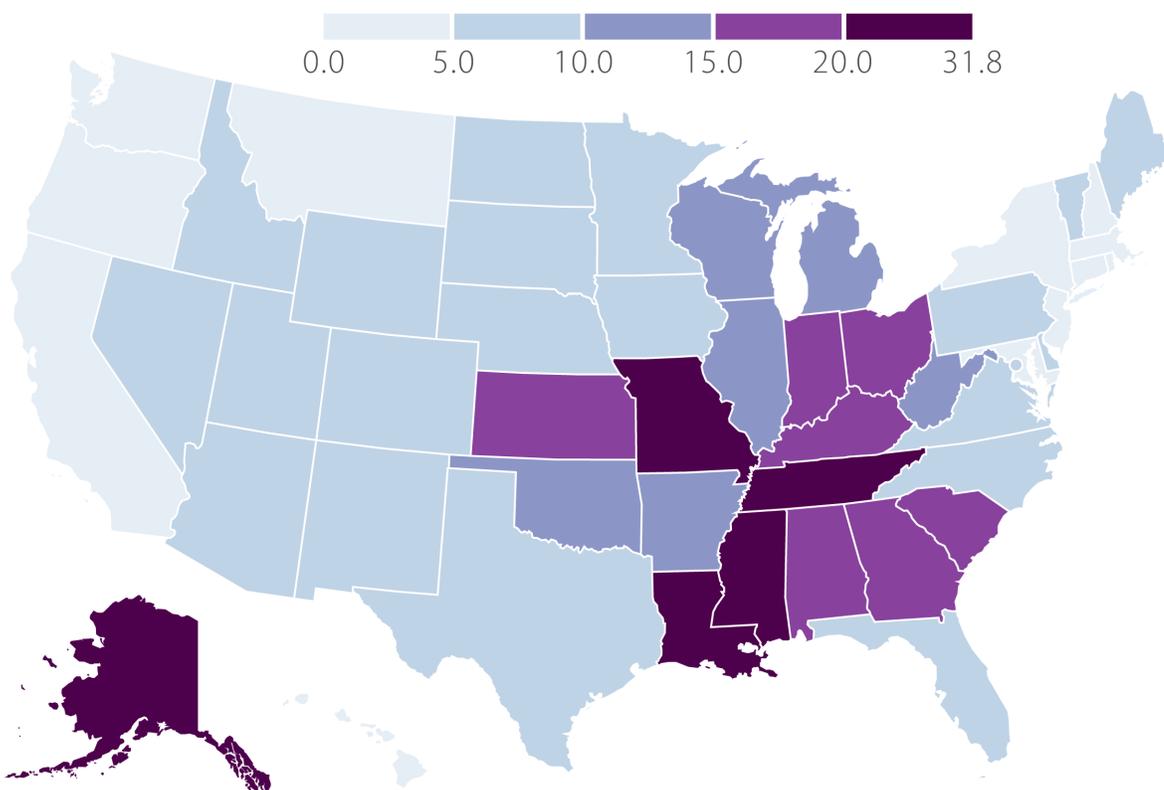
In August, for instance, a [toddler in Hinckley fatally shot himself](#) after finding his father's loaded firearm on top of a gun safe. Later that month a 7-year-old in Brooklyn Park [shot and wounded his 9-year-old brother](#) after finding a loaded gun at home.

All told, according to Everytown, Minnesota kids have accidentally shot themselves or someone else at least 31 times since 2015. At least 11 of those shootings were fatal.

Accidental shootings with children pulling the trigger may seem like an inevitability in a society where there are [more guns than people](#). But rates of unintentional shootings by children vary considerably by state, suggesting that local factors are also at play.

## Where kids pull the trigger

Rate of unintentional shootings by children, per 1,000,000 population, since 2015



Source: Everytown Research

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In Louisiana, for instance, there have been 146 such shootings since 2015, resulting in the nation's highest rate of 32 shootings per million residents. At the opposite end of the scale is Rhode Island, where there haven't been any accidental shootings by children in the past eight years, according to Everytown's data.

There are also some stark differences between neighboring states with similar cultures. Wisconsin's population is nearly identical to Minnesota's, but unintentional shootings by children are nearly three times more prevalent there.

The strictness of state gun laws — particularly safe storage requirements — explain some of the state-to-state differences on these numbers. Generally speaking [states with more stringent laws see fewer accidental shootings](#).

Those laws are usually downstream from partisan politics. The 10 states with the lowest accidental shooting rate all voted for President Joe Biden in the most recent presidential election, while nine out of the 10 worst states supported Republican Donald Trump.

Rates of poverty and crime are also a likely factor, as the places with the highest rates of accidental shooting tend to have [high levels of poverty](#) and [elevated rates of violent crime](#).

Taken together, those factors suggest that accidental child shootings are preventable up to a point. “States with secure storage or child-access prevention laws had the lowest rates of unintentional child shootings,” Everytown found earlier this year. “Rates of unintentional shootings by children were 34 percent lower in states with laws that hold gun owners accountable when children do gain access to an unsecured gun, compared to states without such laws.”

Minnesota [does have legislation in place](#) requiring gun owners to not leave their weapons in places children could access them. But it has no particular requirements for the safe storage of firearms, nor does it require gun owners to lock up their weapons when not in use.

A [bill before the Legislature this year](#) would have required guns to be stored with a lock preventing their use and separate from their ammunition. It drew [strong opposition from gun rights groups](#) and did not advance out of committee.



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**CHRISTOPHER  
INGRAHAM**



Christopher Ingraham covers greater Minnesota and reports on data-driven stories across the state. He's the author of the book "If You Lived Here You'd Be

Home By Now," about his family's journey from the Baltimore suburbs to rural northwest Minnesota. He was previously a data reporter for the Washington Post.

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