



BOARD OF HEALTH

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Johnson County Board of Health Position Statement On Gun Safety

Johnson County Board of Health (JCBOH) supports measures to enhance children's safety by reducing firearm-related harm within our community. This includes implementing strategies that advance gun safety, promote the secure storage of firearms, and improve public understanding of gun violence. Gun violence affects all members in the community, with children being particularly vulnerable to firearm-related incidents such as suicide, homicide, and accidental shootings, which result in premature deaths and profound trauma within the community.

United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy recently declared firearm violence in America a public health crisis with more than half of US adults or their family having experienced a firearm-related incident in their lives. According to the CDC, over the last decade, firearm violence has become the leading cause of death among children and adolescents.

- Households with firearms are four times higher at risk of suicide among children and adolescents
- 44% of youth suicides under 18 who die by suicide use a firearm
- Secure storage practices can reduce youth suicide and accidental shooting by up to 85%
- Children often know where firearms are stored within the household, with 36% reporting to have handled them without their parents' knowledge
- \$380 billion is spent annually due to gun violence in the US

JCBOH supports the safe and secure storage of firearms to prevent unintended firearm-related incidents. Nearly half of all suicides committed involve the use of a firearm. In Iowa, about 79% of all firearm deaths are attributed to suicide. The rate of gun-related fatalities in Iowa has increased 59% between 2012 and 2021. The increase of firearm-related incidents greatly effects the well-being of children in our community. With the increasing presence of firearm-related tragedies, 57% of adolescents have expressed concern over the potential of a school shooting. JCBOH emphasizes the effectiveness of

A community where all can achieve optimal health.

policies and practices that promote the secure storage of firearms ability to significantly reduce unintended harm among children.

JCBOH strongly advocates for proactive measures to promote gun safety for the well-being and protection of children in our community. We encourage parents, caregivers, and community members to engage in open and honest conversations about firearm safety, including whether firearms within the home are stored securely. Furthermore, we encourage all firearm owners to model responsible behavior by regularly securing firearms in lockboxes, gun safes, or with trigger locks. Raising awareness on the importance of gun safety practices within the community is crucial in recognizing the role firearms play in youth suicides, since unsecured firearms significantly increases that risk.

By having these conversations, modeling responsible behavior, and acknowledging the impact of firearms on the safety of our community, we can create a safer environment for our children and reduce the incidence of preventable tragedies.