Injury Prevention: Unintentional firearm injury-related emergency department visits among Kentucky youth aged 10 and under
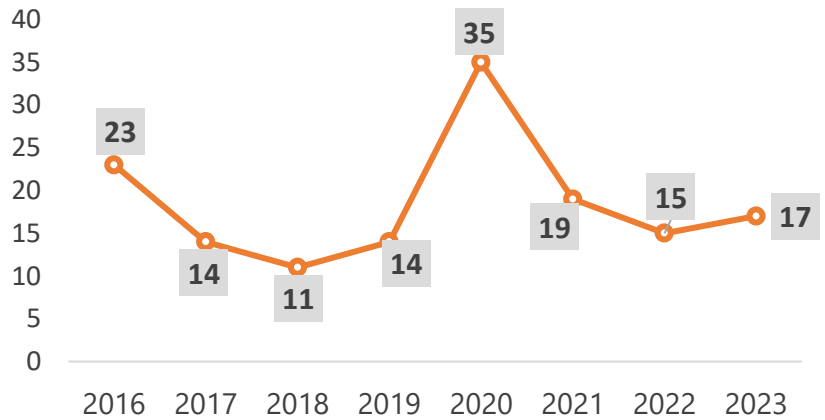
Youth can gain access to firearms within the home, at a friend's house, in the neighborhood, or at school. Kids are naturally curious and may decide to play with the gun, even if warned not to. Playing with firearms is dangerous and may result in unintended firearm injury or death.

Annually, an average of **19 emergency department (ED) visits*** for unintentional firearm injuries occurred among Kentucky youth[1] from 2016–2023.
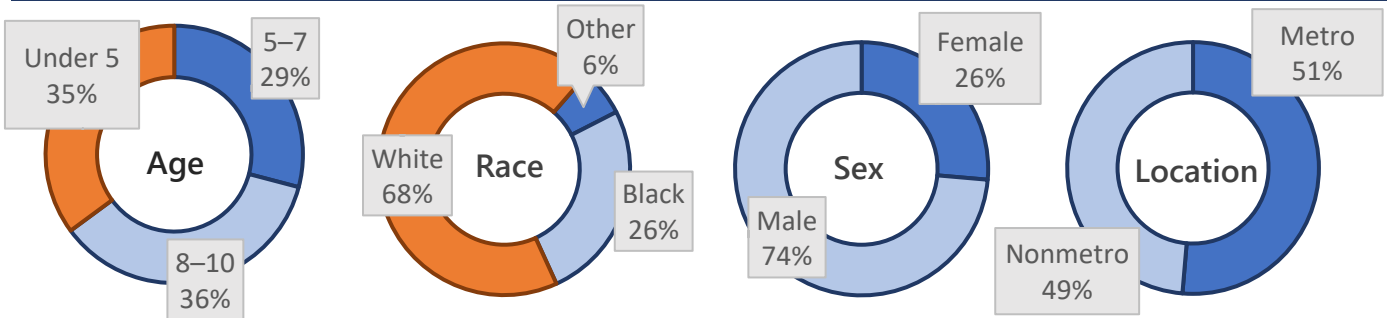
[1]For this brief, youth are defined as Kentucky residents aged 10 and under.

$ The median cost per ED visit from 2016–2023 was **$2,849.**

Unintentional firearm injury ED visits among Kentucky youth[1], 2016–2023[2]

Year	Visits
2016	23
2017	14
2018	11
2019	14
2020	35
2021	19
2022	15
2023	17

Unintentional firearm injury ED visits among Kentucky youth by age group, race, sex, and location[3], 2016–2023

Age
- Under 5: 35%
- 5–7: 29%
- 8–10: 36%

Race
- Other: 6%
- White: 68%
- Black: 26%

Sex
- Female: 26%
- Male: 74%

Location
- Metro: 51%
- Nonmetro: 49%

Of all unintentional firearm injury ED visits involving youth from 2016–2023 (*n*=148), **72%** were male, **68%** were white, and **51**% were from metro areas.

[2]The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2020 should be considered when interpreting data and trend analyses.
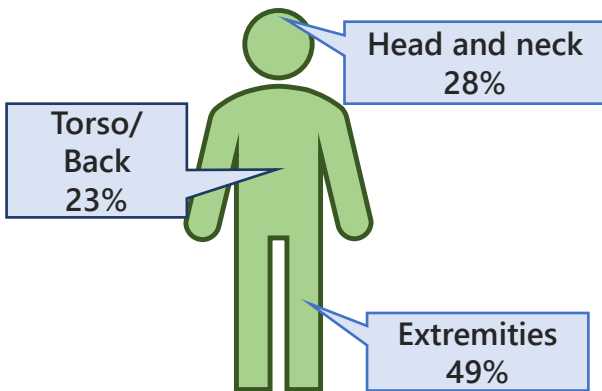[3]Location is defined as metro (counties containing metropolitan statistical areas with populations of 50,000 or higher) and nonmetro (those with less than 50,000 in any urban cluster population) per the 2013 National Center for Health Statistics urban–rural classification.
*ED visits represent encounters of care and could be greater than the number of individual patients treated in Kentucky. Data source: Kentucky Outpatient Services Database, Office of Data and Analytics, Cabinet for Health and Family Services. November 2024. Data are provisional and subject to change.
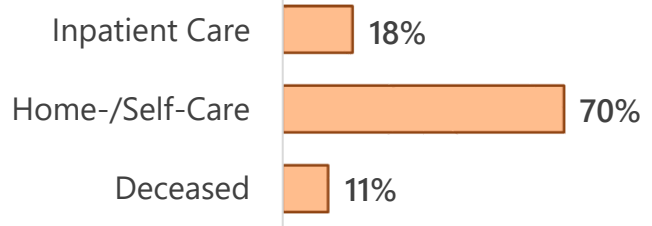
Unintentional firearm injury ED cases among Kentucky youth by body region[4] of injury and discharge status, 2016–2023

Body Region[4]

- Head and neck 28%
- Torso/Back 23%
- Extremities 49%

[4]Only primary body regions and injuries treated in the ED are reported, *n=146*

Discharge Status*

Inpatient Care	18%
Home-/Self-Care	70%
Deceased	11%

*Percentages based on counts less than five are suppressed in accordance with state data management policy.

The most common unintentional youth firearm injuries[4] seen in the ED were open wounds (**72%**), followed by fractures (**11%**) and superficial injuries or contusions (**7%**).

Prevention Tips

Always assume a firearm is loaded.

Don't play with a firearm, and never point it at anyone, including yourself.

Store firearms up and away. Keep them locked up and unloaded.

Talk to kids about firearms and firearm safety. Teach and frequently remind them that the gun violence they see on TV or in video games is not real or acceptable.

Additional Resources

- Ten Tips for Firearms Safety in Your Home https://kspan.egnyte.com/dl/z7xEdqlCTJ
- Gun Storage for Your Lifestyle https://kspan.egnyte.com/dl/kpVoVbn31E
- Project Child Safe® projectchildsafe.org
- Own It? Respect It. Secure It® nssf.org/safety/own-it-respect-it-secure-it/
- Eddie Eagle Gunsafe® Program eddieeagle.nra.org
- International Hunter Education Association USA approved courses ihea-usa.org